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I.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE TRUE CHURCH

"Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's."—I. Cor. 1, 2.

IT is not a little remarkable that the Apostle should address his letter to "the Church of God which is at Corinth." Corinth at this time was a city with a mixed population, and conspicuous for the sin and iniquity commonly found in seaports frequented by traders and seamen from all parts of the world. Paul, by the grace of God, had been instrumental in founding a church here, gathered from this corrupt society, and composed, for the most part, of poor Gentiles. A few Jews, and a few wealthy persons were also included among the converts. Of the latter, certainly not many. 1 Cor. i. 26. Evil abounded on the right hand and on the

left, and many of the converts had apparently fallen into the sins of the corrupt city, sins from which they had only recently been rescued ; some of them sinning even worse than the heathen. And when Paul had written to them, they replied by making excuses for their sins, instead of grieving over them. 1 Cor. v. 2. Then reports reached the Apostle of disputes in the Church, disputes which they had brought to heathen judges for settlement, 1 Cor. vi. 6 ; of confusion in their services, some even drunken when they gathered to partake of the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. xi. 20, 21. He certainly has much for which to reprove them, and yet he commences his Epistle by addressing them as "the Church of God."

The question is frequently asked by young converts, What Church shall I join ? and looking round upon the multiplicity of organisations, they find it hard to come to a decision. In one verse the great Apostle gives several distinct marks which always characterize the Church of Jesus Christ. Wherever we find these we need have no hesitation in joining the ranks, provided, first of all, we know personally our acceptance in the Beloved, our redemption through His blood.

The Church is the congregation or assembly of believers in any given place, called out and gathered together for the worship of God. According to the New Testament usage of the word, the Church must be a single congregation called together for a particular purpose, and not in any sense an association of congregations. The assembly of believers gathered

together in each of the cities where the Gospel was preached was called "the Church." The assemblies in districts, provinces, or kingdoms where a number of congregations are referred to, are called "churches." Thus throughout the New Testament the congregational idea of the Church is never lost sight of. We often hear the term "the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church," and a great visible organisation arrogantly assumes this title as belonging to it; but we have no hesitation in affirming that no visible association, or organisation, or denomination, however wide its ramifications, has any right to this title. Catholicity is not a matter of more or less; it cannot be determined by a majority. No Church which does not claim to contain the whole of Christ's people without a single exception can claim to be catholic. The "holy, Catholic Church" can only be applied to the body of Christ, the company who in all ages, countries, and places are called out and gathered together in Him. We are dealing now, however, not with the Church universal, but with the Church local, a separate assembly, a distinct congregated body of believers, composed of those whom God has called and saved by His grace, redeemed by His precious blood, and indwelt by His Spirit. In one verse Paul gives seven marks by which the members of this Church are characterized, and by which they should be known. May God who has called and gathered make these marks so distinctly the characteristic of Church members, that not only shall their names be registered in the books of the Church local,

but also in the "general assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven."

I. THEY ARE EMPHATICALLY THE CHURCH OF GOD.—"The Church of God which is at Corinth." Thus the Apostle, by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, designates a single assembly, a separate congregation of believers; and by this title shows at once the relationship which the members bear to God. He is absolute owner, they His purchased possession. Paul, addressing the elders of the Church at Ephesus, urges them to "feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Acts xx. 28. This is the Church of God—"redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ." Each Church of God is composed of those, and only those, who have been *bought back*, and called by infinite grace, into the Kingdom of His Son. Others may obtain nominal membership along with God's called ones, but they form no part of the Church. Let it be accepted as an established law, or rule, or principle, that when we speak of the Church of God, we mean the gathering together of God's own redeemed ones unto Christ. In this way, and in this way only, so far as we have read the inspired record, He constitutes a Christian Church. This is a very definite mark, aud by this "the Church" may be known: its members belong emphatically to God. Loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and effectually called by the Holy Spirit; they are, in any given place, "the Church of God."

II. THEY ARE SANCTIFIED.—"Them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus."

The primary meaning of the word sanctify is to set apart; to take something which before was common, put to ordinary uses, and set it apart for God's use only. The Old Testament is full of illustrations of this use of the word. I take as an example Exodus xiii. 2, "Sanctify unto me all the first-born." Exodus xxix. 44, "I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar; I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office." Exodus xxxi., "The altar . . . . his vessels, and the laver and his foot, thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy." So also in Psalm iv. 3 we read, "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." In this sense, too, Christ uses the word in John xvii. 19, "For their sakes I sanctify myself"—or set apart Myself; by which He clearly meant that He gave Himself up specially to God's service, to be occupied only with His Father's business, to do only His Father's will; and in this sense the word is used here. The Church of Christ by its very existence is a body of men and women set apart for a holy use. Has this truth been realized as it ought? When a vessel, cup, altar, or instrument was set apart for Divine use, it was never used for common purposes again. How suggestive and solemn is this fact! If we are sanctified in Christ Jesus, we ought never to be used for any purpose but for God. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in

your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Henceforth we are not to do our own works, or serve our own interests. Think of the dignity to which God has called His redeemed ones—vessels set apart for the Master's use. If tempted to sin, say, "No, I cannot! I dare not! How can I do this wickedness and sin against God?" Let us be sure that we are meeting God's purpose in calling us and setting us apart in Christ Jesus.

III. THEY ARE HOLY.—"Called to be saints."

Sanctified, or counted holy, in Christ Jesus, we are called to be holy, to exhibit, in life and character, the holiness of God. Those whom God calls into His Church, He calls to be, above all else, holy. Those who, calling themselves Christians, despise holiness of heart and life, are in direct conflict with God. Over and over again we find it enjoined in the Volume of the Book, "Be ye holy": and if in the members of the Church of Christ there be not a holy hungering and thirsting after more likeness to Christ, a holy appetite for heavenly food, a holy panting after spiritual companions, a holy concern for more prayerfulness, a holy taste for spiritual and eternal things, and a holy indignation at everything that dishonours God, let them pause and question the genuineness of their Christianity. Oh, to set a high—a still higher—value upon purity of life and godliness of conversation. The Church at Corinth was in danger of forgetting this. One of its members had been a gross offender, but his offence had been

screened; and of him Paul uncompromisingly says, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." He demands his immediate excommunication, for the man's own sake and for the Church's sake, that the evil might not spread,—1 Cor. v. 6-11. The Church of Christ must be pure, must maintain its sanctity, must ever remember it is composed of those who are called to be saints. We must be alive to the absolute necessity of holy living, bearing in mind that this is the very object of the Church's existence, and of our being called into its membership. "According to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."—2. Tim. i, 9.

"More holiness give me, more strivings within;
More patience in suff'ring, more sorrow for sin;
More faith in my Saviour, more sense of His care;
More joy in His service, more purpose in prayer.

"More purity give me, more strength to o'ercome;
More freedom from earth's stains, more longings for home;
More fit for the Kingdom, more used would I be;
More blessed and holy, more, Saviour, like Thee."

IV. THEY ARE IN LIVING UNION WITH BELIEVERS EVERYWHERE.—"With all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Church at Corinth had no superiority over other churches. Every other church was on exactly the same level with it. Dr. MacLaren expresses the thought beautifully, when he says: "Just as the water

in a little land-locked bay, connected with the sea by some narrow strait like that at Corinth, is yet part of the whole ocean that rolls round the world: so that little community of Christians had its living bonds of union with all the brethren in every place that called upon the name of Jesus Christ."

While we fearlessly assert that, according to New Testament language, a *church* is an organised body of believers assembling "in one place", and that that cannot be a New Testament Church which requires more than one place to assemble in; these may be *churches*, but *a church* must be a company of saints that can assemble in one place, meeting together—"unto the edifying of itself in love." Yet there is a real, living bond of union with every company of believers in every place. The name of Jesus Christ our Lord links them everywhere. We hear much in these days about the union of churches. Can it be because this link is lost? With living union in the name of the living Lord, we want and can ask for no more!

V. They are Characterised by Prayerfulness. —"All that call upon the name," &c.

Prayer is so outstanding a characteristic in the life of those who are really members of the "Church," that Paul here gives it as actually a name by which they were distinguished from others. It is remarkable how large a portion of the Word is occupied with the subject of prayer in the life of God's children; and we are quite sure that what God has made so prominent in His Word, He intends it to be con-

spicuous in our lives. As early as Gen. iv. 26, we read, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." Men recognised that God was a being to be adored and worshipped, they found the absolute necessity of waiting upon Him, seeking His aid, and invoking His help; and just what the term means in the Old Testament when applied to God, that it means in the New Testament when referred to the Lord Jesus Christ. So fully did believers from the very first recognize the Divinity—the God-head of the Lord Jesus, that to Him they prayed, on Him they called; Him they worshipped and adored and invoked. It is plainly evident that when Paul wrote these words, "prayer to Christ" was not only a distinct exercise at stated periods, but was so woven into the texture of believers' minds, and extended so through the length and breadth of their lives, that "everybody knew whom they worshipped and understood whose men they were." Christians have been called disciples, believers, brethren, saints. It will be a glorious day for the Churches of Christ everywhere when again they are distinctly recognised as those who "call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." Prayer is indispensable, from first to last the Christian needs to pray. Prayer must be the sign of our regeneration, the proof of our continuance, and the closing expression of life's pilgrimage.

VI. THEY MAKE CHRIST EVERYTHING TO THEM. —"Jesus Christ our Lord."

The words:

> "Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
> More than all in Thee I find,"

are words of real meaning—full of import to the followers of Christ. To them Christ is everything. In Him they find a completeness, an all-sufficiency which meets their every case, and circumstance, and need. To them He is pre-eminently LORD. He is "very God of very God." "Equal with the Father as touching His Godhead." All that God's great and incommunicable name—*JEHOVAH*—means, belongs by royal rights to our Saviour. Beyond a question, the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the same as "Our Lord" of the New. Him we honour, Him we worship, Him we adore, upon Him we call. The Father's Sovereign will concerning the Son is this—"That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him," —John v. 23. Thus all members of the "Church of God" give to their Divine Saviour the homage of their hearts, the devotion of their souls, the worship of their lips, and the complete mastership of their lives. To them He is—JESUS. The very thought of Whom—"with sweetness fills the breast." We call upon "Our Lord," and know that infinite resources are at the Sovereign disposal of our Divine Redeemer. We call upon the name of Jesus, and know that we have upon the throne our Brother man. One who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," One Who hath suffered, and is "able to succour them that are tempted." "To Him Whom we adore as Lord we draw near in tenderer, but not less humble and prostrate, adoration as our brother, when we call

on the name of the Lord Jesus, and thus embrace as harmonious, and not contradictory, both the Divinity of the Lord and the Humanity of Jesus." To them He is—CHRIST. The Messiah. The Anointed. Clothed with Divine *authority*. His position He holds by the Father's own appointment. Authorized and qualified; fully fitted and anointed. In Him all fulness dwells. Having received the Spirit without measure, we call upon His name in the full assurance that our Divine-Human Messiah, the anointed Lord, can do for us "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

VII. THEY SHARE THE SAVIOUR WITH BELIEVERS EVERYWHERE.—"Both theirs and ours." As the salvation which is theirs in Christ Jesus is "the common salvation," Jude. 3, and their faith is "the common faith," Titus i, 4; and the temptations which beset their path "such as are common," 1 Cor. x, 13. So the Saviour whom they worship and adore, whose they are, and whom they serve, is the common Saviour, shared in equally by every believer in every place. No one Church has a monopoly of Christ. As there is "no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved," so there is no other Lord in whom believers are banded together, and to whom they owe absolute allegiance. While each New Testament Church has the right of self government vested in it by the Supreme Head of the Church, and no Church can exercise Lordship over another; and so Churches may differ in minor

details, and the manifestation of distinct gifts—yet Christ is Saviour of all and Lord of all. But this claim has not only its rapturous joys and exalted privileges, it has also its duties and responsibilities. We must share with believers everywhere in cloud as well as in sunshine. When we hear them spoken of with contempt and ridicule, treated with obloquy and scorn, for being "of the Way," we must come boldly and fearlessly forward and say, "Both theirs and ours," and thus willingly take the responsibility connected with our union in Jesus Christ our Lord.

"Like a mighty army moves the host of God.
Brothers, we are treading where the Saints have trod;
We are not divided, all one body we—
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity."

II.

HOW TO JOIN THE CHURCH

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said unto them, 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.' And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, 'Save yourselves from this untoward generation.' Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."—ACTS ii. 37-41.

THE outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples having, as John Foster puts it, "rung the great bell of the universe," a vast crowd of people assembled, some from curiosity, some in a spirit of mockery, others with an earnest desire to find out the truth, and all thoroughly perplexed and at a loss to understand its meaning. Peter, rising to the occasion, preached a sermon so convincing and powerful that about three thousand

souls accepted the Lord Christ, and became disciples in one day. The Church of Jesus Christ at Jerusalem began the day with one hundred and twenty members; before the day closed it had increased by thousands. The picture which these verses present is a most interesting one, and worthy of our closest study. We are introduced to the first Christian Church, and see the Church dealing with her first enquirers, and receiving her first additions. The centuries since then have not altered one whit the essentials to true membership in the true Church. What these essentials are, it will be our privilege now to study. May the Holy Spirit make them to be easily remembered, and easily carried out. These steps are :—

I. HEARING THE WORD.—"*Now when they heard this.*"

Going back to verse 14, and reading carefully Peter's magnificent and marvellous sermon, we learn what they had heard, and find he had preached a crucified, risen, exalted Lord, and argued the absolute Lordship and Messiahship of Jesus, bringing the witness of Scripture to prove every statement.

What Peter preached, there is the basis of all Gospel preaching to-day. From beginning to end his theme was Christ. Alas, alas! that any other theme should be ever brought into our pulpits; that it should be true that any one may go into chapels and churches in this fair land of ours, and hear sermons that have not the remotest connection with

Christ and Him crucified. We want no modern innovations. We need no new Gospel. The Christ of Calvary is sufficient for every need of the human heart. Read the sermon again, and you will find, as one has put it, he preached "a *full* Gospel, Christ and nothing less; a *plain* Gospel, Christ and nothing more; and a *pure* Gospel, Christ and nothing else."

If you desire to be blessed with the richest of all blessings, be found where the Gospel of the grace of God, the Word of the Eternal truth, is faithfully preached; for it is as true to-day as when Paul wrote to the Romans, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Where the Word is preached, the power of the Lord is present to heal. The Holy Spirit convinces of sin, and brings assurance to the heart through the Word. I care not how sinful or wicked a man may be, there is hope for him if he comes under the sound of the Gospel. Peter preached that day to the actual murderers of our blessed Lord, and many of them were, we believe, savingly converted.

II. Conviction of Sin.—"*They were pricked in the heart.*"

Speaking of the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christ had said, "When He is come, He will convict the world of sin." To Peter, as to the other disciples, He had just lately come, and under His power Peter has preached the Word, with the result that the sharp point of the two-edged sword, thrust home by the

Holy Spirit, pierced to the vital part. There was pungent sorrow. There was real alarm. There was deep conviction. As Matthew Henry says, "A prick in the heart is mortal; under these commotions, saith Paul, I died." While Peter preached the people were "stung with remorse," the sense of their awful guilt and danger came upon them unexpectedly, with overwhelming power. They saw the dreadful part which each had taken in the death of Christ. They saw with awful vividness that the Christ whom they had crucified was their promised Messiah As with tongue of fire Peter spake, they saw with swift conviction that they had incurred the just displeasure of God, and their whole soul was distressed.

There is no way of salvation other than this. Until men feel themselves sinners, guilty of the death of Christ,—"*that same Jesus whom ye have crucified*,"—there can be no offer of pardon. The greatest means for conviction is a view of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Led to look upon the bleeding Lamb, the truth is borne home that not only did sinners nail the Saviour there, but sin made it essential that He should be nailed there. Viewing, under the power of the Holy Spirit, the sufferings of Christ for sin, the eyes are opened, the heart is pierced, the conscience is touched, the whole being is awakened, as we see what we deserve to suffer on account of sin, and what He, the holy, spotless Son of God, has suffered and borne on our behalf. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, (He) who knew no sin; that we might

be made the righteousness of God in Him,"—2 Cor. v. 21. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed,—" Isa. liii. 5. Gazing, by faith, upon the suffering Saviour, we are convinced of sin; and conviction of sin leads men in earnestness to seek the Saviour. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

III. INQUIRING THE WAY.—"What shall we do?" So vivid was their sense of wickedness that like the burdened sinner in the first sentences of *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, they cried, "*What shall I do? What shallI do?*" The work of conviction led to a spirit of inquiry. Convinced that they had put the Lord of life and glory to death, that they had crucified their Messiah, they are overwhelmed with perplexity. In effect they say—"We cannot undo the past! What can we do?" Convicted of the heinousness of their sin, and seeing their desperate condition, they are filled with a burning, eager desire to be put right, and, breaking through all propriety, they interrupt the preacher with the cry, "What shall we do? Something must be done! must be done now! and we are eager and ready to do it." Most gladly would we be interrupted in our preaching with a similar inquiry.

I know of no more hopeful sign for a church than when there is an earnest spirit of inquiry abroad; for most sure am I that those who see their sinner-

ship, feel their need, and set themselves to seek the way Zionward, Christward, Godward, will not be long in finding the way and hearing the plain directions spoken to their hearts, "This is the way, walk ye in it." "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

IV. INSTRUCTION IN THE TRUTH. — "Repent, and be ye baptized," &c.

Peter answered their inquiry by giving them simple and plain directions. He did not make faith a fetish or a charm, but an intelligent act. He lays down two conditions, and assures them of two rich blessings.

(1) Note the conditions.

"*Repent.*" There is a very clear distinction drawn here between mere conviction of sin and true repentance. We must not overlook the fact that Peter speaks this word to those who were already pricked in the heart. Repentance is a decided advance upon conviction; for we may feel that we have done wrong, and yet not really turn away from it. "Godly *sorrow* worketh *repentance*." (2 Cor. vii. 10.) However deeply men may feel their sin, and cry out concerning it, they have not repented until they have turned from it to God. Repentance is not emotion, but action. As Mr. Moody used to tersely put it, "Repentance is right-about-face." "*Be baptized.*" As the rite by which they would publicly express the genuineness of their repentance, their acceptance of Jesus as their personal Saviour, and their consecra-

tion to Him and His service. They must not only turn from self to God, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but they must openly and publicly confess that they have come under the sway of the Messiah. I take it that both the repentance and baptism were in, or *upon*, the name of Jesus Christ—upon the authority of Christ; and repentance preceded baptism, being as much more important as the inward conviction is more important than the outward evidence of it. Both repentance and baptism were personal acts, and were to be regarded as inseparable, being the inside and outside of Christian discipleship. To be baptized "upon the Name of Jesus Christ" is not only to be baptized upon the authority of Christ, but also on the ground of the revealed character of Jesus Christ; and this involves faith in that name, for without faith the baptism could not be on the ground of the name. "Repent, and be baptized *every one of you*," saith the Apostle. As obedience to the Divine requirements is of the utmost importance, there must be no exceptions.

(2) Note, too, the matchless blessings.

"*For (or unto) the remission of sins.*" Not that baptism secured the remission: the words are not to be attached to the immediately preceding clause, but to the whole of the sentence which has gone before. As the first act of obedience to Christ, and as the expression of their union with Him, the baptism symbolized the fact that in Him, and through faith in

Him, there is the entire putting away of sins. "The sins are sent away; the sinner is discharged."

"*And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*," &c. Could it be that these wonderful gifts of pardon, peace, and of the Holy Ghost might be theirs? Yes, on fulfilment of these conditions, even the murderers of Jesus shall receive the Holy Ghost. It was no half gospel that Peter preached. What is to-day called "the second blessing" was with him included in the first.

The ringing, rousing words of Peter assured them that each might claim this promise for themselves as if made to them personally, and showed the promise large enough to include not only Jews but Gentiles who were "afar off." Blessed be God, we, in these days, are included in the reach of this rich promise; but for us, as for the Jews, the gift of the Spirit is connected with obedience to this command. Of our blessed Lord we read, "And Jesus, answering, said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him." (Matt. iii. 15, 16.) And for every disciple of Christ we read, "And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him." (Acts v. 32.)

V. SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD.—"*Save yourselves from this untoward* (crooked) *generation*."

With intense solemnity and earnestness Peter exhorts his inquirers to immediately and definitely range themselves on the side of Christ, to make the line of demarcation between them and the world clear and unmistakeable. This world is doomed; destruction, imminent and real, overhangs it. Let yourselves be saved from any participation in its guilt and doom. God will deal with the world in one way, but with His separated ones in another way. The influence of the world is evil, and only evil. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." (2 Cor. vi. 17.) The condemnation of the world is certain and inevitable. Yield implicitly to the impulse that draws you from it and separates you unto the Lord! The Lord's separated ones are not numbered among the people of the world. "Them that are without, God judgeth." The world is "crooked" in all its ways, and will not conform to the will and way of God. Let not those who would be Christ's followers be in any way mixed up with it. "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (Jno. xvii. 14.) Though we must needs mingle with the people around us, yet let us live and act as a distinct and separate race. Separated unto Him "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." (Gal. i. 4.) "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." (Phil. ii. 15.)

VI. FAITH IN CHRIST.—"*Then they that gladly received His word.*"

Not all who heard, or all who were convicted, but they that received. To receive the Word is nothing more or less than to receive Christ. "And as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name." (John i. 12.) Inquirers are rightly directed when they are led to Jesus Christ. Some, alas! never get further than the inquiry room. These paused not until, believing the whole truth concerning Christ and salvation, they received Him by faith, and by Him were saved. The *Revised Version* omits the word "*gladly*," but whether it be in the text or not, most sure are we that the day men find their way to Jesus, or are found by Him, is the gladdest, happiest day in their lives. A day never to be forgotten. Of Zacchæus we read, "He made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully," and it is ever so. How many have rapturously and joyously sang:—

"Oh happy day, that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God;
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad."

VII. OBEDIENCE TO THE WORLD. — "*Were baptized.*"

The preacher had said "Repent, and be baptized," and "they that received the Word *were baptized.*" With all our hearts we wish the same order had been retained, and were universally followed to-day. Obedience, it has been said, is the first duty of a

soldier. It is certainly the first duty of a soldier of the Cross to be obedient to his Captain and Commander. As these fearlessly confessed Christ in baptism, in obedience to the clear instructions they had received: so should believers in the same Christ to-day gladly and willingly obey His command, and thus confess their oneness with Him in death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism is plainly the appointed method of confessing Christ, therefore every disciple should be baptized. Immersion was the only mode of baptizing, as, indeed, the word clearly signifies; therefore every believer should, as soon after his acceptance of Christ as possible, be immersed. No one can find a simpler, or more significant, or better method. The clause concerning baptism in the Church's great commission was not inserted by us, neither dare we leave it out, nor advise any follower of our blessed Lord to neglect it.

VIII. MEMBERSHIP WITH THE CHURCH.—"*The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*"

Thus by easy and clearly-defined steps we reach the communion of saints, the brotherhood of believers, the body of Christ, the family of God, the army of the redeemed. As we learn from the succeeding verses, these were real additions to the membership, and proved the genuineness of their union by continuing in the faith, adding immensely to the power of the visible organization, manifesting the spirit of true brotherhood, enjoying to the full the blessings

and privileges which were theirs in Christ Jesus; and so manifesting the spirit of Christianity that the increase did not stop with them, for the Lord added to them day by day such as were being saved.

III.

HOW TO CONTINUE IN THE CHURCH

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."
—Acts ii. 42.

BEFORE Christ left His disciples, He promised them that they should receive "the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon them"; and after waiting in prayer and supplication for ten days, the promised blessing came, came while they were "all of one accord in one place." The chapter from which our verse is taken describes that wonderful and memorable day; and gives us the outline of Peter's marvellous sermon, the effects which the sermon produced,—becoming the arrow of the Lord's deliverance to three thousand souls, and resulting in their conviction of sin, conversion to God, confession of Christ, and coming into union with the Church. We never read of one of these three thousand converts back-

sliding or withdrawing from the Church. Though there must have been many a hindrance both from within and from without, yet they persistently adhered, and loyally persevered, in giving earnest attention to their training in the Christian life. Brought into a living and real union with the Church of Jesus Christ, they continued therein, stedfastly. Though their conversion, baptism, and membership with the Church were sudden, all taking place in one day; though they were exposed to persecution and contempt, they stedfastly adhered to the glorious truths they had that day received. They went to work in the right way by joining the Church at once, eagerly desiring further instruction in the truth, and to be taught "all things whatsoever He had commanded;" and then proved that their acceptance of Jesus as Messiah and Lord was deep and real by continuing.

Not only were three thousand "names" added to the Church, but there is deep significance in the fact that they were three thousand "souls." Names on the Church roll may or may not stand for much, but "souls" in union with the Church must mean a living, working, powerful organization.

There are four distinct points in the training of these young converts, each of them as important now as it ever was. As we study them we will, I think, have a very complete answer to the question, "How can we ensure Christian stedfastness to-day?"

I. THEY CONTINUED IN THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE.

That is, as the *Revised Version* has it, the *teaching* of the Apostles; but teaching implies something taught, and that is doctrine. The thought evidently is that as scholars in the School of Christ, these, who were young in the faith, pushed on day by day to know more and more. The teaching would necessarily be in the words and works of Jesus, and His Messianic dignity as proved by the prophetic Scriptures. Having fixed their choice on Jesus Christ, they would now be fixed in the truth, "as the truth is in Him."

The whole body of believers attended regularly the teaching services of the Church, and then put into practice the practical duties of religion which they had learned,—continuing to follow the directions given to them, and to carry out the precepts which the Apostles instilled.

If we would be intelligent Christians, knowing what we believe, why we believe, and believing our beliefs, we must attend to the teaching. We must study the great doctrines which cluster round the cross: the truth concerning Christ and salvation, —the Incarnation, Divinity, Humanity, Atonement, Resurrection, Ascension, and Exaltation of Christ; the Inspiration of the Scriptures: the free yet Sovereign grace and love of God the Father, the substitutionary sacrifice of God the Son, and the daily operations and indwelling of God the Holy Ghost. These are but a few of the doctrines which the

apostles taught. Let us get these great truths clearly fixed in our heads, and firmly settled in our hearts, and stand by them come what may. These are days in which doctrine is decried, and creeds are at a discount. Paul, writing to Timothy, clearly saw that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts." 2 Tim. iv. 3. These degenerate days are upon us now, and it is necessary that we "should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Jude 3: for if the doctrines of the Cross of Christ ars not acknowledged, and their authority admitted, we are left without any sufficient guide to conduct us safely along the dark and dangerous pathway of life. Let our minds be saturated with the truth of God; drink deeply of the waters of life which flow out from these sacred records; desire the sincere milk of the Word, go on to the strong meat of sound doctrine. Be careful to be "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine,"—1 Tim. iv. 6. "Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine,"—1 Tim. iv. 13. And then let us go forth, and let men see the power and beauty of our creed in the purity and blamelessness of our lives, and prove to all that we are Christians indeed. Thus, and thus only, will our lives approximate to that one life of faultless symmetry and unbroken harmony. Thus, and thus only, will we be able to walk with that consistency which will preserve our influence unimpaired and our peace undisturbed.

II. THEY CONTINUED IN THE APOSTLES' FELLOWSHIP.

The word "fellowship" comes from a root which means literally *sharing in common.* The practical nature of the fellowship is very clearly seen by comparing the ways in which the same word is translated in other places in the New Testament. As a rule, Scripture is its own best interpreter. In Romans xv. 26 the same word here translated "fellowship" is rendered "contribution,"—"It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem." In 2 Cor. ix. 13 it is "distribution,"—"Your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men." In Hebrews xiii. 16 it is "communicate;" "To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." In 1 Cor. x. 16 it is "communion",—"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ." While in Phil. i. 5; ii. 1, 3, 10, it is plainly used in the sense of "participation." From all these Scriptures, the meaning of the word is clearly defined. It was the word used for the collection of money for the poor saints, and for the share which believers took in transmitting these alms to those in need. Fellowship in this sense is a most exalted and noble thing, and a privilege not to be lightly esteemed. It showed the oneness of the whole body of the faithful in state, in privilege, and in obligation. Sharing thus in common there was created a spirit of mutual recognition, a manifestation of common interests,

and a closer partnership with each other in the blessings and privileges of the Gospel,—leading them to share joyfully their goods with others. Taking the word in the meaning thus given, we cannot fail to see that the contribution or collection became a regular, an abiding institution in the Church of Christ.

(1) It is evident that they encouraged each other in the things of God, and continued to do so. They were as one loving family, and loving each other they took every means in their power to keep the glow of love aflame. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." What better means of encouraging the members of the Church can there be, than by conversing freely together of the things of God? As the fellowship meant participation, communion: so in their intercourse with each other there was a constant interchange of thought in matters of spiritual experience. I fear this aspect of fellowship has been sadly lost in these days. How seldom we talk about God! We talk about anything—everything else—about leaders, teachers, sermons, books; but how seldom do we find the conversation, even among a party of Christians, centring round God: and yet one of the sweetest of the "precious and exceeding great promises" is given to those who practice the habit of speaking about God, and the things of God. In the same chapter in which we read of bringing "all the tithes into the storehouse," and so paying attention to the contribution, the collection, and proving the Lord of Hosts herewith, we also read these precious words:

"Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in the day that I do make, *even* a peculiar treasure; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." (Mal. iii. 16-18) Revised Version.

(2) They had a mutual regard for each other's welfare, and continued to show it. Communion, participation, fellowship cannot exist where one member is indifferent in the smallest degree to anything that affects the welfare of another. The member who takes no interest in the welfare of his fellow-member is guilty of violating the partnership in which all believers are embraced. If I am one with him, what touches him, touches me; his sorrows, dangers, duties, joys, prosperity or adversity, are mine. In true fellowship there can be no isolation, no independence: all are sharers in common. If we are members of the body of Christ, then, in a very real sense, "there should be no schism in the body; but the members should have the same care one of another. And whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it." 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26. Thus recognizing and standing by the ordinance of the Apostles' fellowship, we will "rejoice

with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." Rom. xii. 15.

(3) There was also regular, systematic provision made for practical help as it was required. Continuing in the Apostles' fellowship, it is clear that the members of the Church gave freely and willingly "as the Lord had prospered them" for the relief of poor saints, and that a regular distribution of the contributions so given was made to those in need. Later on, "when the number of the disciples was multiplied," it was found absolutely necessary to appoint deacons to take this matter in charge, that they, overlooking the temporal affairs, might leave the Apostles free to attend to the purely spiritual matters. That these contributions became a regular institution, a weekly ordinance, in the Churches of Christ, is clear from Paul's words to the "Church of God at Corinth." Following immediately upon the greatest, the profoundest treatise ever written upon the fundamental doctrine of the "resurrection," the Apostle, without pause or break, says, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. Very clear is the teaching of the Apostles, in this connection, for every member of the Church of Christ to-day. When this view of the Apostles' fellowship is more fully grasped and understood by the members of the churches everywhere, and every member of

every church shares in the privilege of giving "as the Lord hath prospered," all appeals either from pulpit or press will instantly cease; for there will be sufficient in the hands of the office-bearers to meet every claim, of any and every nature. Looking upon the collection as a part of the worship of God, and that the Master Himself sits over against the treasury, the members will give, not as little as they can, but in the full consciousness that "He knows" what proportion their giving bears to the amount left in their hands.

III. They continued to remember Christ in the Breaking of Bread.

This is the New Testament description of the simple feast in commemoration of our Lord's death. The mysticism and superstition that have since gathered round the ordinance were unknown then. By this they perpetuated their consecration to Him and His service. By this they kept aflame their love to His sacred person. By this they looked forward with eager anticipation to His return. As often as they could they gathered, that they might "show forth His death till He come."

What more delightful service was ever instituted than this simple memorial feast? Often have we been amazed that any child of God could turn his back upon the memorials of the Redeemer's death. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, unless we have a good and valid excuse, one which we can con-

scientiously give to our Lord and Master, we should embrace every opportunity of meeting with Him at His table. Yet what paltry excuses Christians often make; how easily they allow the most trivial thing to be an excuse for absence.

The symbolical elements in the dear memorials of His sacred passion are bread and wine; but the spiritual provision is Jesus Christ Himself, and He upon whom by faith we feed is also Master of the feast and provides the richest and best of fare. He spreads before us the wonders of His grace. He assures us afresh of pardon, peace, holiness, and joy; but more than all of His undying love and sure return. Here the love of Christ is specially displayed; and as we partake of the simple emblems, there is borne upon our minds, with renewed vividness, the fact that we are commemorating the greatest manifestation of compassion and love that was ever displayed in the universe.

By all means let us keep, and keep regularly, this feast; for Christ commands it, "This do in remembrance of Me." Our love to Him must ever constrain us to do His bidding. Have we not repeatedly said, "Behold, Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord, the King, shall appoint." This, too, is pre-eminently the Christian's distinctive ordinance. We cannot come at any time to His table in the right spirit without receiving rich spiritual benefit. Here our love will be inflamed, our faith strengthened, our hope brightened; joy and peace will abound, and our soul be richly refreshed.

IV. THEY CONTINUED IN THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER.

Their life was spent in an atmosphere of communion with God, until prayer became the habit of their souls. Private prayer and public prayer, family prayer and social prayer, became the order of the day. No ordinance was neglected, and every possible means of grace was used to help them in their Christian life. If we would be strong Christians, we must cultivate the art of waiting upon God in prayer, both in private and in public. The Word of God is thickly studded with commands, admonitions, and promises in connection with prayer, teaching us its importance and necessity. No more powerful weapon was ever placed in the hands of man than that which the Christian wields in prayer. Let us cultivate the art more and more. Draw near to God in faith, lay hold upon Him in prayer, stir up the soul continually; "To talk with God, no time is lost. Talk on! Talk on!" By the weapon "*all prayer*" Bunyan's Christian conquered Apollyon; and by the same weapon we, too, shall successfully meet, and triumphantly conquer, every opposing force.

Here, then, are four particulars in which these first additions to the Christian Church are an example to all young converts now. Continuance in these four things will be sure to keep a young Christian stedfast. Backsliding is impossible, and so is coldness of heart, so long as we are true to the Apostolic Ordinance of Teaching, the Apostolic Ordinance of Fellowship, the Apostolic Ordinance

of Breaking of Bread, and the Apostolic Ordinance of Prayer. Beyond a question, these give us the conditions of permanence and continuance in the Church. No power either on earth or hell will be strong enough to move the soul from its mooring ground in Christ Jesus, if these injunctions be faithfully, zealously, lovingly, and continuously carried out and adhered to. In the fulfilment of these Christ will be glorified, and the soul will be continuously blessed.

IV.

HOW TO ADD TO THE CHURCH

"And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved."—Acts ii. 47 (R. V.)

EVERY word in our verse is pure gold, and deserves to be earnestly and prayerfully pondered. We have in previous studies seen "How to join the Church," and "How to Continue in the Church." Our present theme is one which follows naturally—"How to add to the Church." I have chosen the rendering of the *Revised Version* for our meditation, but it matters little which rendering we study: for in either case the sense is the same, and gives us an object to keep ever full in view, a goal toward which every member of the Church should be continually aiming.

It is refreshing and strengthening to know that although there may be blanks in the daily register of any one of the Church's, there are no blank pages in God's, register; every day some are being added

to Himself, by Himself. The Holy Spirit is carrying on His mighty ministry, "Convincing of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come," and leading convicted sinners to Jesus' blood. As Arnot beautifully expresses it, "The Lamb's book of life has a page for every day, and names on every page." May it be ours, in the providence of God, by the consistency of our lives, by the uprightness of our conduct, by the favour of our service, and by the clearness of our testimony, to be used by Him in the glorious work of adding to the numbers in the birth-register of God. Letting our "light so shine before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven."

I. THERE WAS A VISIBLE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST WHICH COULD BE ADDED TO.

(1) It is impossible to read the Acts of the Apostles without coming to the conclusion *that those who were converted and professed their faith joined themselves to a visible organization.* There is a tendency, I know, in some quarters to-day to depreciate the institution of the Church. I know also that it is possible to make too much of the Church. But while we would not fall into the danger, on the one hand, of making too little of it, nor the fallacy, on the other hand, of making too much; yet, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and students of His great class-Book, the Word of God, we cannot fail to see that He has made abundantly clear His desire that all His followers should band together, and form, in each locality where they

may be placed, a strong, loving, compact brotherhood. Banded together that they may be taught "all things whatsoever He has commanded," and so be trained into faithful, intelligent, loyal, and devoted servants of the Christ Who has saved them, and become in every place centres of usefulness,—spreading the truth, and evangelizing the regions round about, until the light and truth shines on to the regions beyond. Christ never contemplated a condition of things in which believers would live as separate units, and try to go to heaven alone.

Many to-day, calling themselves Christians, denounce Churches, and think the less they have to do with them the better. We have been told by some that the only way to promote the unity of the body of Christ is by the disintegration of the Churches. Many hold aloof, saying, *It is enough to be a Christian, and we are likely to be better Christians by having nothing to do with Churches.* But if it be right for one believer to remain out of the Church—the local, visible organization—then it is right for every other believer to remain in the same condition; and we have no hesitation in saying that were this brought about, then all open avowal of Jesus Christ as Lord and Master would cease, the confession of Christ would become a dead letter, the maintenance of the ordinances of Christ would soon be considered unnecessary, and all work for God and humanity would come to an end.

We would unite with the Church, say some, *if it were pure.* But so long as the Churches are composed of men

and women who are themselves imperfect, when shall we find one that is perfect? Perfect we may be in Christ Jesus, our perfect, spotless Lord, but in ourselves never. If you wait for perfection, friend, you must wait until you get to heaven. "At last I have found a perfect Church," said one who had lately joined a certain assembly of believers. One of the officials, a holy, godly man, immediately replied, "Well, madam, for my part I never hope to find a perfect Church on earth, and if I did, and were to join it, it would immediately become imperfect."

Another objector says, "*The Church has been split up into so many sections, I do not know which to join.*" To this we can only say, If you are desirous of going strictly by the Word of God, you will look out for the Church which is nearest to the Scriptures, the Church which holds fast by the truth both in doctrine and ordinances, and where the Gospel of the grace of God is faithfully proclaimed: and then, casting in your lot with it, you will seek with all the members to form and cherish a loftier conception and ideal of the institution of the Christian Church, and, remembering the promises and purposes of Christ concerning His Church, will strive earnestly to realize them.

(2) *Only those were added to them who had first given themselves to the Lord.* When it says, "the Lord added to them," or to the Church, it means that the conversions, which were continually taking place, were from beginning to end His doing. By His Spirit they were convicted of sin; through Christ's blood

they were redeemed and accepted; by His Divine power they were regenerated, and adopted into the family of which Christ is the living Head. Through Him they were led personally to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Having thus by Sovereign grace been delivered from the corruption which is in the world; and having professed their separation from the world in the great separating ordinance of believers' baptism, their next and most natural step was to be added to the Church. Thus conversion was a condition, and in every New Testament Church must still be a condition, of Church membership. Only those were accepted by the Church who themselves professed to have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour, and so by Him were saved, were being saved, and would be ultimately saved.

We have no authority from the Word of God to receive into our membership any but those in whom the work of salvation has begun. Those only who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ to the salvation of their souls, and are day by day experiencing the exceeding greatness of His power in delivering, keeping, preserving, and sanctifying them, are fit candidates for Church membership. May the Lord in His infinite grace add many such to our number! To have power for God among men, the Church must have power with God for men, and so its purity must at all costs be carefully maintained. We care not how young the candidates may be, how limited their knowledge or experience, we will gladly welcome them on condition that they have accepted Christ as

their personal Saviour, and are desirous of being taught His will; that they may keep His statutes, and walk in the way of His commandments. As C. H. Spurgeon says, "Church membership is not a certificate of advanced Christianity; it is simply the recognition of the profession of saving faith in Jesus Christ."

II. ALONG WHAT LINES MAY ADDITIONS TO THE CHURCH BE EXPECTED AND ATTAINED?

There are many ways in which this question may be answered, but, confining ourselves to the chapter round which we are gathered, to the paragraph from which our verse is taken, we shall, I think, find several very clear indications of the condition of the Church itself when God trusted it with these constant additions: and so find an effectual answer to our question.

(1) *The presence and power of God were fully realized.* Verse 43, "And fear came upon every soul." A reverential, solemn awe fell upon those who believed. God's hand was so clearly and plainly seen, God's power was so mightily and fully manifested, that as they stood in the presence of the mysterious power, working such wonders of grace and love: the believers were filled, to use Dean Alford's words, with "a reverential astonishment," and the unbelievers, who might otherwise have injured, were restrained from interfering. The Lord Himself was there, and men soon began to know and feel it. The great attraction which the Church should present to the world to-day

should not be in the beauty of the building in which it worships, its elaborate and correct ritual, or the simplicity of its ceremonial, its perfect machinery, or even its crowded congregations; but the fact that God is in it and with it. His presence realized, His glory manifested, His power exerted in enlightening, comforting, healing, saving, blessing men. When men can say of the Church as Jacob said at Bethel, "Surely the Lord is in this place," it will not be long until they also say, "We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you."

(2) *Frequent manifestations of God's power were witnessed.* Verse 43, "Many wonders and signs were done by (through) the Apostles." Christ had promised that it would be so, and none of His promises have ever fallen fruitless to the ground. If we desire to find a parallel to these "wonders and signs" in the present day, may we not look for it in the conversion of notorious sinners? In order to prove the genuineness of the Gospel, miracles, in the sense of healing the lame, or raising the dead, are no longer necessary; but miracles of grace are constantly being wrought by the power of God. Where the Gospel of the grace of God is proclaimed in the power of the Holy Ghost, there "the power of the Lord is present to heal." Under the awe-inspiring, thrilling consciousness of the presence of the Lord, great results will be expected, and so great works among great sinners will be attempted, and God will reward the faith that dares to believe and do. "Follow Me," the Master still says, "and I will make you fishers of men."

(3) *Warm brotherly love abounded.* "And all that believed were together, and had all things common," —Verse 44. This was not communism in the present day meaning of the word; it was simply and purely Christianity in its most practical operation, and in its truest form. As a well-known writer says: "The picture here presented comes nearer to Paradise regained than any other the world has seen." Assembling regularly together, and "continuing in the Apostles' fellowship," the practical character of that fellowship took so powerful a hold upon them that a spirit of true brotherhood was created. Grasping firmly the truth that they belonged to God, they naturally looked upon all they had as belonging to Him also, and held all they had in trust for God and His poorer ones. That there was nothing arbitrary or imperative about this community of goods is clearly proved by the fact that all possession of property did not cease among Christians. Ananias was told that he need not have sold his house, and might have kept the proceeds (Acts v. 4); and Mary, the mother of John Mark, possessed a house of her own, Acts xii. 12. It was evidently a purely voluntary arrangement, and arose from the constraining impulse of brotherly love. They could not bear to have, while another wanted. When the same principle is revived in the Churches of Jesus Christ again, want will be abolished, and the Gospel will spread with greater strides.

(4) *Christian charity was lovingly practised.* "And they sold their possessions and goods, and parted

them to all, according as any man had need," verse 45. All they had, whether lands or houses or other personal property, was held as not their own; all was consecrated to God, for the use and service of the brotherhood. It is of interest to note that the verbs *sold* and *parted* are in the imperfect tense, evidently indicating that the sale and distribution only took place as the need arose. Two things are here quite clear,—first, that the possessors were themselves the distributors; and secondly, they did not surrender or share the control of their possessions with their fellow-believers. In the first ardour of their new conviction, with hearts already in heaven, filled with the daily anticipation of their Saviour's return, they obeyed literally the direction to lay up for themselves no treasure on earth, to sell that they had and give alms, to forsake all and to follow Christ.

(5) *Public and private worship were continually maintained.* "And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart," verse 46. No more beautiful picture could be conceived than this life of holy, happy service. There are four outstanding traits here. CONCORD, "*with one accord.*" COMMUNION, "*breaking bread at home.*" GLADNESS AND SIMPLICITY, "*singleness of heart.*" As Jews, for some time yet, their public worship was in the temple where all would meet. As Christians they gathered more privately to remember Christ in the breaking of bread, but wherever they came together the gladness of God

was upon them, while one aim animated them. Satisfied and thankful themselves, they sought to spread abroad the virtues of the Christ in whose faith they gathered with a sincere and pure heart.

(6) *They lived a life of praise*, "praising God," verse 47. Their whole life was a life of praise. Happy in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, they wrapped themselves around in Him, and daily, by life and lip, by character and conduct, showed the thankfulness of their hearts by the devotion of their lives. When Christians live well and act well for Jesus Christ, then men begin to speak well of Jesus Christ; and in the glorifying of Jesus, God is praised.

(7) *The holiness and consistency of their lives won the admiration of the people*, "having favour with all the people." The days of persecution were not yet; ere the fierce fires of persecution fell upon them God gave them space in which the seeds of godliness might take firm root, and they become so grounded in the faith that though "scattered everywhere" they might not be moved from their stedfastness in the faith. In the meantime the beauty of holiness was so manifest, their liberality so conspicuous, their joyfulness so real, their love to God and men so sincere and pure, that they won the favour of the people. If we would more manifestly show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, we should be more likely to win the favour of others for the Gospel we profess. As surely as "the common people heard Him gladly,"

so surely will they be attracted when His followers exhibit Him in heart and life.

(8) *Continual conversions and additions were grauted to them.* "And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved," verse 47. Their loyalty to Jesus Christ was rewarded by the Christ whom they served working mightily on their behalf. They were true to Him, and He was true to them. They went from strength to strength, and ripened day by day in the onward, upward, heavenward course of salvation. A church that sets forth such examples of holy living, and joyous brotherhood as are here indicated will, beyond doubt, be blessed with similar evidences of the Lord's recognition and favour. We may expect additions on a large scale when every day every member of the Church is, by walk, example, and testimony, living, teaching, and preaching Christ. May God make His people everywhere living evidences of His quickening, saving power!

V.

THE CHURCH'S WEEKLY FEAST

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

—I. Cor. xi. 23-26.

I HAVE been asked to take as my theme at this time, the New Testament observance of the Lord's Supper; and I am the more ready to comply with this request because I fear that to many this precious institution of our blessed Lord's has seemed a strange and meaningless service; and that many have failed to grasp the simplicity and importance, the solemnity and impressiveness of this sweet commemoration feast.

The passage from which our text is taken may be called the proof-passage upon this important subject,

and here, as wherever else the subject is dwelt upon, there is an entire absence of that superstition which has since been associated with it. We never find it called "a sacrament." We search in vain to find anything approaching the Roman soldiers *sacramentum* in this simple memorial feast. It is never regarded as one of the conditions of salvation. Nowhere do we find it needing to be administered by a special order of so-called "priests," or specially ordained men; never required to be received fasting; and never once alluded to as in any sense a repetition of the offering of the body of Christ. These errors so commonly taught and believed to-day, were far removed from the design of Christ, the teaching of the Apostles, and the minds of the early Christians. To the followers of Christ then it was "the simple rite which at once expressed the domestic idea of the Church and the worth of Christ's death, while it separated the partakers from this crooked generation and bound them into one."

With the first Christians so closely was the Lord's Supper connected with their ordinary meals, that it is often difficult to determine whether the term "breaking bread" refers to this ordinance or not. To them it was an interwoven part of their daily meal, sanctifying that by the continual remembrance of the Lord's death. The evil into which the Corinthian Church fell was the very opposite of that which prevails to-day. They made it too much like a feast, in which the rich enjoyed their own repast, and left the poor to hunger. The words of

the Apostle correct both the error of the Corinthians and the error of to-day. Let us mark :—

I. The Institution of the Lord's Supper.

Paul was not present on the occasion of its institution. Ere ever he had been converted the Church observed this ordinance, yet he received his authority for teaching it, not from the other Apostles, nor from any of the Churches, but from the Lord Himself. "*I have received of the Lord that which also I have delivered unto you.*" The careful and detailed description which he gives proves that he who had been favoured with "revelations," made to him as a chosen vessel (Gal. i. 12; 2 Cor. xii. 1) had also been honoured with a direct communication about this glorious ordinance.

(1) *Note the time of the institution.* "The night in which He was betrayed." Is it not strange that the ordinance should be connected with that dark betrayal? Many other events transpired on that memorable night, yet it is this dark deed that comes before us whenever we partake of this ordinance. Why was this? Was it that His love might appear the greater in contrast with such base and cruel ingratitude? Or, is it intended to warn all professing Christians of the danger of repeating in any form the sin of Judas?

2. *The order of the institution.* "Took bread," &c. It was during the celebration of the Passover with His disciples, Matthew says it was "*as they were eating*," when Jesus thus took bread and said, "*This*

is My body." Is it not clear that from that moment the whole character of the Passover service changed? In all the thousands of families in which the Passover was celebrated that night, no such words were uttered as were heard in that upper room at Jerusalem. "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake, and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. xxvi. 26-28. Have we not here some idea of the claims and power of Jesus, when we consider that in a single sentence He put a meaning into the feast which has eclipsed all others; and by a single touch He swept aside the great national anniversary and put His own work in its place: so that to-day, in one form or another, the Lord's Supper is commemorated in almost every land?

In the Christian Church many services and ceremonies have been introduced which can lay no possible claim to Divine sanction or authority—alas that it should be so; for this it is which has kept the visible church "sore opprest—by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distrest." But this is not the case with reference to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Of such supreme importance is it to the children of God, that it, together with the ordinance of Believer's Baptism, has been established, ordained, and appointed by Christ Himself, for perpetual observance by all His faithful followers. To this hour we have

Baptism and the Lord's Supper remaining with and perpetuated by us. True, it is hard to recognise the Jordan in the font, or the simple meal at Jerusalem in the splendour of the mass: but our duty is all the more plain, because of the additions and changes which have so concealed the original rite. We must maintain the two Christian ordinances in their primitive simplicity.

II. The Meaning of the Lord's Supper.

(1) *It is a constant memorial of Christ.* "This do in remembrance of Me." A memorial of His dying love —His sacrificial death—His atoning blood. The symbols in this memorial feast are bread and wine, and in both the death of Christ is made prominent. The bread is broken, the wine outpoured. The most important part of Christ's history was not His life—beautiful, helpful, healing, and blessed as that life was—with all its spotless purity, its words of wisdom, its words of power: all would have been in vain, and long ere this have been forgotten, but for His death. His death crowned by His resurrection, in which He was proved to be the Son of God with power. His great, stupendous work was not accomplished by living, but by dying. Every time we gather round the table of the Lord we gratefully commemorate the Redeemer's atoning work. Can we come too frequently? Would that all our churches had adhered to the practice and example of the early disciples, and gathered habitually "upon the first day of the week to break bread."

In the symbols used there is vividly brought to our mind, not only the reality, but also the painfulness of His death. He died by bloodshedding, from every pore, during the Gethsemane agony: from the thorn-pressed brow, from lacerated hands and feet, and from spear-riven side. The cup tells us this. And the bread broken speaks of His body bruised for us. Dying, not as a martyr, not as an example, but as a vicarious sacrifice, to make atonement for human guilt. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed,"—Isa. liii. 5. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,"—1 Peter iii. 18.

(2) *The Supper is also dispensational.* "This cup is the New Testament, or Covenant, in My blood." The first covenant has appropriately been called The Covenant of Works. Its terms and conditions were substantially—"This do, and thou shalt live." This first covenant was ratified by blood when "Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words,"—Exod. xxiv. 8. This covenant, was broken by the nation's sin and repeated disobedience. The second or New Covenant is rightly called The Covenant of Grace, as it emanates from the free, unmerited mercy and favour of God, in Christ Jesus. The connection between the two covenants is described in Hebrews ix. 18-22, and the conclusion of

the last verse of the chapter, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many: and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." When we come to the table of the Lord, and eat and drink with our Beloved, we signify our acceptance of His offer of peace. We set to our seal, and ratify the covenant of grace. We proclaim His death. We testify that He is ours and we are His. We say in effect: "Thine we are, Jesus, and on Thy side." The language of our heart is:—

> "'Tis done, the great transaction's done,
> I am my Lord's, and He is mine;
> He drew me, and I followed on—
> Charmed to confess the voice Divine."

It is the blood of Christ that cleanses from all sin. It is His death that is our life. Not the power of that perfect life, but the power of the Cross, is the power of God unto salvation.

(3) *It anticipates His coming.* "Ye do show (proclaim) the Lord's death till He come." This service not only looks backward to His suffering, but also forward to His return. The memory of what He suffered is joined on in brightest hope and most glorious anticipation to the blessed fact that "this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven,"—Acts i. 11. As surely as these symbols remind us that every prophecy concerning His first coming was literally and actually fulfilled, so do they assure us that every promise and

prophecy concerning His Second coming will be as really and as literally fulfilled also.

> "Till He come! Oh, let the words
> Linger on the trembling chords;
> Let the 'little while' between
> In their golden light be seen;
> Let us think how heaven and home
> Lie beyond that 'Till He come.'"

III. The Manner of Celebrating the Lord's Supper.

By manner I mean, not the posture we are to assume, or the position we are to occupy, but the state of mind in which we are to keep the feast. In the verses immediately following our text the Apostle has been careful to show the deep solemnity, the need of self-examination before partaking, the personal character, and the distinctly spiritual nature of the Lord's Supper. It must ever be remembered that the table is the Lord's table, and not the Church's; and that we commune as members of Christ's body, as believers in Him and rememberers of Him. If this truth had only been distinctly and clearly kept in mind, what sad, sore trouble would have often been avoided!

Christ, who has Himself instituted and appointed the feast, has bidden every true follower of Him to draw near as "oft as he will." How can any child of God allow any trifling, earthly thing to interfere with his accepting the Master's invitation? We ought to be sure that we have an excuse which we can conscientiously give our Lord and Master, 'ere

we turn our back upon, or remain away from, His board.

Let it be remembered that it is possible to partake of this ordinance unworthily, as the Corinthians did who came together for self-indulgence and not for the remembrance of Christ. If we come in any other spirit than simply to remember our dying Lord, spiritually discerning the Lord's body, we come unworthily. Hence self-examination is absolutely necessary (verse 28). Not in order to find reason for satisfaction in or with ourselves; not in order to justify our remaining away, but that we may partake intelligently and reverently. However deep our sense of sin and personal unworthiness may be, yet, if we trust simply in Him whose death for sin is here set forth, we may in the full assurance of faith draw near and partake worthily.

"According to Thy gracious word,
In meek humility,
This will I do, my dying Lord,
I will remember Thee.

Can I Gethsemane forget?
Or There Thy conflict see,
Thine agony and bloody sweat,
And not remember Thee?

When to the Cross I turn mine eyes
And rest on Calvary;
O Lamb of God, my sacrifice,
I must remember Thee."

VI.

THE CHURCH PRAYER-MEETING

"Where many were gathered together praying."
—Acts xii. 12.

READING the chapter from which these words are taken, we find that perilous times had fallen upon the Church of Christ. James, the son of Zebedee, has been slain by the sword; first of the twelve to drink of the cup which Christ drank, and to be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptised. Now Peter, one of the most conspicuous men in the Church, has been seized and cast into prison, where his custody has been made as perfect as chains, bars, strong walls, massive gates, locks, powerful masonry, and soldiers can make it. What can the feeble Church do against the power of Herod? Thank God, in the Christian armoury there is a weapon before which the strongest human power is feebleness! That weapon is ALL-PRAYER, and "prayer was made without ceasing of the Church

unto God for him." With child-like confidence, they place their trust in the profoundest reality in the world to them, the personal friendship, the mighty power of God. Earnest, importunate, fervent, definite, united, unceasing, believing prayer was the force which they exerted on his behalf—a force which proved effectual.

If ever there was a time when the Church needed to follow the example of the early Christians, it is now. It is right that we should assemble to hear what fellow Christians may have to impart to us; but our supreme need is more prayer. It has been wisely said lately by a prominent leader, "The lost art in the Church to-day is the art of prayer." Does any intelligent Christian doubt the truth of this statement, or consider it exaggerated? Let him enter any prayer-meeting (so-called) and, with rare exceptions, what will he find? Little prayer and much speaking or preaching; little calling upon God, but much exhortation to man. He will usually find a company met, not to take hold upon God, but to listen to some instruction from man. In how many places we find that Church members think the prayer-meeting not worth the trouble of attending—nay more, not worth the trouble of holding. Mr. Spurgeon once encouraged each individual believer to earnest intercession for the cause of Christ by reminding them that *a grain might turn a nicely-balanced scale*. We must not let the lightness of our weight—our want of influence—keep us back from importunate pleading with God. We may think ourselves

of no account, occupying a very lowly—an obscure—position; and yet our absence from the prayer-meeting may mean the absence of the "grain" necessary to turn the scale.

One evening in the week has been set apart by most churches for prayer, and that evening should be kept sacred by every church member. The pocket-diary of every member should have prayer-meeting night marked "engaged," and nothing should be allowed to interfere with that engagement which will not form a reason which can be conscientiously given to his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ; each member feeling it both a duty and a privilege to be present, and take part as often as possible, so that the week evening prayer-meeting may be known as the place "where many are gathered together praying."

It is amazing to hear some of the objections made by professing Christians against prayer-meetings. One says, "*I can pray at home.*" So you can, so you ought, so you must; no one ever dreamed of telling you not to pray at home. Surely, this is a reason, not for staying at home, but for exercising your gift in company with your brethren. Pray at home by all means, but pray at the congregational family altar too. A minister called upon a member who had been neglecting the week-night service. He went straight up to the fireplace in the sitting room, and with the tongs removed a live coal from off the fire and placed it on the hearth, then watched it while it turned from the red glow of heat to a black mass. The member in question carefully observed the pro-

ceeding, and then said, "You need not say a word, sir; *I'll be there on Wednesday night.*" Another says, "*I have ceased attending because many of the prayers are not edifying.*" Does this mean, brother, that you were in the habit of attending the prayer-meeting, not to wait upon God, but to criticise those who took part? I am not surprised that you have got no blessing. I am in no wise astonished that you have grown tired and given up your attendance. I am exceedingly surprised to hear such an excuse from *you*. You call yourself a Christian. You profess to love the Lord's people. You know that you have personal needs which none but God can supply. You know, too, that every member of the Church is in need of daily grace. You see the condition of the world around you. I have heard you join very earnestly in singing:—

> "Prayer was appointed to convey
> The blessings God designs to give;
> Long as they live should Christians pray,
> For only while they pray they live."

Did you believe these words? Do you believe them? Then let your place be occupied next prayer-meeting night; and let your voice be heard in earnest supplication. I have heard prayers that certainly could not be called edifying; but it has been comforting to repeat to one's self the assurance—

> "Though our language simple be,
> Words are nothing, Lord, with Thee."

God knew what that illiterate brother meant, though his language was far from being grammatical. God

understood that sister, though she expressed hersel in peculiar terms. Brother, give up at once and for ever your habit of criticising the prayers of your fellow-members, and go in heart and soul for making the prayer-meeting a time and place for whole-hearted waiting upon and wrestling with God. Throw your whole soul into it, and I am positive you will enjoy, more than you have ever enjoyed anything, the weekly congregational prayer-meeting. Frankly, I believe you are as much, if not more, to blame than those you have been criticising. Exercise to the fullest your gifts, and others will follow you, and the prayer-meeting will soon become to you, and many others, a bright, joyful, happy, hallowed place.

Here is another, who says, "*I cannot go because so-and-so attends.*" Well, I do not know what awful thing can have happened between you and "so-and-so" that should lead you to renounce the prayer-meeting because of his presence there. Whoever he is, and whatever he may have done, I like to think that he comes up week by week to the place of prayer. It seems to me that he is in the place where anything that is wrong can be righted, where everything contrary to God can be put away. Judging from your present attitude, I fear I cannot say as much for you. Now, do you really desire to attend the prayer-meeting, to unite your prayers and praises with your fellow-members? Then will you just pause here, and get your Bible? Turn to Matthew xviii. and read carefully verses 15 to 17. They contain

instructions from the Master Himself. It is not necessary for me to urge you to do what He commands. Let the fact of your being united in Church membership stand for something, and let the term "Brethren in Christ Jesus" be a reality. I read some time ago in "Neander's General History" that "The Names 'brother and sister,' which the Christians gave to each other, were not names without meaning. The fraternal kiss, with which everyone, after being baptized, was received into the community by the Christians into whose immediate fellowship he entered, which the members bestowed on each other just before the celebration of the Communion, and with which every Christian saluted his brother, though he had never seen him before, was not an empty form, but the expression of Christian feeling, a token of the relation in which Christians considered themselves as standing to each other." Jerome, in his Commentary on the Galatians, gives a very beautiful picture. I wish I could throw it on the screen, that you, gazing at it, might be impelled to go at once and make matters right with "So-and-so." He says: "The disciple whom Jesus loved was a very old man, residing at Ephesus. He was accustomed, now unable to walk, to be carried to the place of the Christian assembly, and, incapable of continuous discourse, used to stand up, and, with faltering voice, utter these words, 'Little children, love one another.' This was his address at all the meetings, and on someone asking him why he always said the same thing, the venerable apostle replied: 'It is our

Lord's commandment, and if it is obeyed, all is well.'" Need I add another word?

In the light of every-day fact, I confess I fail to understand an excuse which another brings to me. He says, "*It is not possible to attend the week-night prayer-meeting, as I have so many other engagements.*" Brother, do not be angry with me, if I say flatly and plainly that I do not believe you! cannot help saying this, and for this simple reason. Though I have known you for some time, I have never yet heard you give this excuse when asked to attend an evening concert or spend an evening in the house of a friend, or have a pleasant evening with a few choice companions. I have watched you for some time now, and I cannot recall a single week in which there were not one or two nights without engagements, or engagements of no more pressing importance than any of these I have mentioned. The fact of the matter is, you do not want to go. Where there's a will, there's a way. Had you the desire, you would soon and easily make the way. Acknowledge frankly and fully that you do not go, because you have no wish to go. Stand face to face with the fact that as you do not care to breathe "the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air," or to join the fellowship of Saints, you have gone back, sadly back, in your spiritual life; and as this fact, in its stern reality and solemn meaning, comes homes to you, fall upon your knees and say, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Some one has said, "Surely it is not too much

to say that *all real growth* in the Divine life, *all victories* over our spiritual enemies, *all real success* in work for God, *all confidence* in the presence of difficulties and dangers, *all repose of spirit* under great and unexpected disappointment, *all habitual communion with God*, depend upon the practice of prayer, and the measure in which it is felt to be a great reality."

Visiting a Church member some time since, and gently remonstrating with him for not attending the prayer-meeting, he said to me, "*I am keeping it before me, sir.*" That same evening at the prayer-meeting I congratulated another upon his regular attendance, and his ready reply was, "*Yes. I lay myself out for it.*" I need not say that with the one it was unfortunately always "before him," while the other was always to be found with the gathering of God's children. Will not your attendance at the prayer-meeting depend very largely upon which of these answers would be yours?

I have come across some professing Christians who tell me that *they cannot pray, they have not the gift*, and they give this as an excuse for remaining away from, or maintaining silence in, the prayer-meeting. Just think of it. A Christian, and cannot pray! Surely there is a mistake somewhere! Surely this cannot be! It seems just as easy for me to believe that a man could be an experienced mariner who never trod the deck of a vessel in his life, as to believe that a man can be a Christian and cannot pray. What is wanted is not the gift of prayer, but the spirit of prayer. If Christians were more frequently

found in secret prayer with God, they would find it an easier thing to pray in public. Passing a boot-maker's shop once, I noticed a card in the window bearing this legend, "We do our best work on the knees." Aye, doubtless, and so is it with every child of God. This is the secret of *power*—power to pray, power to live, power to work, power to conquer.

There are seven weighty objects for which all God's children should unite to make supplication, each one forming a powerful reason why "many should be gathered together praying." I will only mention them, and leave you to think them over, until they burn into your heart. We need to plead for:—

1. *A present outpouring of the Divine blessing.*
2. *The prosperity of the Church of God.*
3. *God's blessing on every agency at work for Him.*
4. *The ingathering of the unsaved in our immediate neighbourhood.*
5. *The speedy evangelisation of the world.*
6. *That men everywhere may come under a mighty conviction of the Holy Ghost.*
7. *That our daily business may be transacted in the fear of God.*

VII.

PERSONAL SERVICE

"To every man his work."—Mark xiii. 34.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES has said a multitude of good things, but none better than this, "The human race is divided into two classes—those who go ahead to do something, and those who sit still and enquire, Why wasn't it done the other way?" Unfortunately this division is found where we ought least to expect it — in the Christian Church. While a few willing toilers "serve Him and see His face," the majority seem to think that they may simply believe and be saved, and then look on and criticise while others work. This ought not to be. There is no Christian, man or woman, who ought not to do his or her share in the work of the household.

We call ourselves followers of Jesus. In what sense are we following Him? His life began with

"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" it was continued with "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work," and He ended it saying, "I have glorified Thee on earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." As in the world He was ever a busy worker, so each of His followers should serve Him constantly. For each one of His servants Christ has some specific work. How shall we ever say, "I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do," if we have not even yet enquired, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Alas, to how many the Master has to say, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" Is it not a fact that the majority of Christians live and act as if the end and object of their salvation was their own personal safety? Whereas, they have been delivered that through them God may be glorified in Christian service. We often say, "Man's chief end is to glorify God," and yet how slow we are to do His will! It has been said that "labour is the result of the fall," and it would seem as if Christians believed this and said, "the less we have to do with it the better." They forget that ere ever a sinful thought entered Adam's mind he was a labourer, and a labourer by Divine Commission, the work given him being—to dress and keep the garden. Christ was constantly, unceasingly active. Time never hung heavily on His hands: His being the only life in which there was no time wasted, no opportunity lost, nothing left undone that might have been done.

What works of love and deeds of mercy and blessing He crowded into those three short years of His ministry! The ever-active Christ would have His people active, too, and has given "to every man his work."

We are servants under authority to an absent Lord, who may return at any moment. Knowing the capacity, the capability of each, He assigns to each his allotted task; and to be faithful to our trust, to be found at our post, to be doing our appointed work, is the best possible preparation for His return, come when He may. Watching for the Master's coming means working, making ready, and so being ready. The real watcher is the earnest, faithful worker, who is desirous of having all in readiness in case his Lord should come soon and suddenly. I know of no subject or thought which should so stimulate to active, whole-hearted, faithful service as the anticipation of Christ's speedy return.

It would seem as if the Master had said to every servant in His household, "I am going, but I shall return again; in the meantime I leave you in charge. Having entire confidence in you, I give you authority; trusting you fully, I leave the household to your thoughtful care,—Occupy till I come, and when I return I will compensate each according to his work."

My subject divides itself under two simple heads. First: Every Christian has a work to do for Christ; and secondly, Christ expects every Christian to do his work. May the Holy Spirit graciously use these as

little fish-hooks to catch a band of willing workers for our peerless Master.

I. EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS A WORK TO DO FOR CHRIST.

The household which the Master has left for a time, is intended to be a busy hive, with no drones in it. Did not John Wesley catch this idea, and reduce it to practice, too, when he made the motto of his societies, "All at it, and always at it."

(1) *The whole Church is to be an active, aggressive, working Church.* Each member a servant in the household, and each having his appointed work; each one a soldier of the Cross, and all on active service. Unfortunately the vast bulk of Christians have quietly shelved this work upon Ministers, Evangelists, Local-preachers, and the like, while they have taken the place of visitors in the house, and expected to be waited on and served. All God's children are in the ministry; He has no sons who are not servants. God's clergy are not a band of men with white collars and black coats, performing Divine service. Nay, His clergy are the members of Christ's Church, men and women who have "turned from idols, to serve the living and true God." Saved, in order that they may serve. Someone has divided the Church of Christ into two classes—Christians and Christian workers; this is surely a mistake, and in correction of it we have only to turn to Ephesians ii. 8, 10. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of

works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Each man, woman and child, who, being saved by grace, has joined the household, should be a worker in the household. The motto cut out on the Eddystone Lighthouse, "To give light, to save life," should be the motto of every Christian's life. Whatever power, or gift, or faculty God has given us, He desires, He expects, aye, He deserves that these should be brought into use for Him. The Church is not accomplishing its mission unless it is a training school for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." A Salvation Army Officer said to me, "We do not want members, we want workers," and if instead of simply trying to swell the roll of Church membership, we brought the gifts, large and small, of every member into requisition for service for Jesus Christ, what greater and grander results would be accomplished. What, after all, is our life worth, if it be not devoted to the winning of souls for the Saviour! What is Church membership worth, if it is not a sphere from which, directed by the pastor and officers, we can use our gifts in this sweet service!

(2) *In the household all are not expected to do the same work.* "To every man *his* work." Each member should seek to know God's will as to the particular department of labour where he can best use his gifts for the glory of God. All have not the same gifts,

and Christ's service is diversified enough to meet the powers of each. In Andrew Murray's admirable book, "With Christ in the School of Prayer," it is well said, "Every believer is a labourer; not one of God's children who has not been redeemed for service, and has not his work waiting. It must be our prayer that the Lord would so fill all His people with the Spirit of devotion, that not one may be found standing idle in the vineyard." Let our prayer be, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and if it be our earnest and sincere desire, we shall soon be led by the Holy Spirit into the right sphere. But, says someone, "*People cannot all preach!*" Quite true! if by preaching you mean standing in a pulpit and delivering a long discourse, correct in diction and orthodox in divisions; people cannot all do it: but, do you know that none of the words used for "preaching" in the Word of God, except, perhaps, with one exception, have any reference to present-day sermonizing? They simply mean going about as a crier. Dr. Duff said, if he could not get people to come and hear him in the ordinary way, he would go out to the street corner, clap a pair of old shoes together to attract the people, and then tell them that Christ died for sinners. That is preaching the Gospel. Someone asked Mr. Moody once how to reach the masses, and his ready reply was, "Go for them." Yes, go for them, with the love of God in the heart, the example of Christ in the life, the story of Calvary on the lips, and the power of the Holy Spirit behind our words.

But, says another, "*I have no talent.*" Let me ask you, friend, How do you know? It is quite possible that you may not at present be able to serve in the front ranks, but I am positive you can help other workers. If you cannot be a lighthouse, you can be a match; if you cannot be a captain, you can be a sailor, "serving faithfully." Peter was worth ten Andrews, but Andrew led him to Christ. We may have small talents ourselves, and yet we may be used in drawing better and greater men to Christ. We may not be able to teach much about Christ, but we can invite the unsaved to where Christ is taught. Though we have not power to draw the train, we can move the lever which lets on the steam, the valve which sets the locomotive going.

> "Do what you can, being what you are;
> Shine like a gloworm, if you cannot be a star;
> Work like a pulley, if you cannot be a crane;
> Be a wheel-greaser, if you cannot drive a train."

(3) *Our work should be constant, persevering, and humble.* To one writing to Calvin to spare his exhausted frame, he said: "What! would you have my Master find me idle?" Have you noticed how Paul takes it for granted that every believer is doing some work for the Lord? "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your abour is not in vain in the Lord,"—1 Cor. xv. 58. The word "abound" here is very comprehensive, denoting excess. A happy translation is "always doing too

much in the work of the Lord." A Christian cannot be said to abound, if he only now and then puts forth an effort. Steady, persistent labour is necessary to abounding activity. It is easier to serve by steady, untiring effort, than by fits and starts. Though our numbers be small, and our instrumentalities feeble; though, personally, we have few talents, and but meagre gifts, shall we therefore be discouraged? Nay, for "one with God is a majority." Great victories by feeble means and small numbers honour God and His Gospel. Keep at it, brother! Let not thy heart be dismayed, nor thy soul discouraged. Let not thy hands be idle, nor thy lips be silent. Place yourself wholly and unreservedly at God's disposal, and He will hear your prayer and bless your efforts, and multitudes will be gathered into His kingdom. You will soon prove that a few wholly consecrated men can, with God, do more and better work than great crowds could ever effect without Him.

II. Christ Expects Every Man to do His Work.

If on the eve of a great battle the English Commodore could send word throughout the fleet: "England expects every man to do his duty;" and the words thrilled through every heart, leading every man to stand unflinchingly at his post that his country's honour might be maintained—surely in the grander service of the King of kings, in the battle against sin and unholiness, in the war against the world and ungodliness, the citizens of heaven should maintain the

honour of their country; so that He Who has given "to every man his work" may always find every man at that work! If the call of our beloved King for volunteers brings answer from every land where his wide sceptre holds sway, and the numbers ready to fight for King and country are greater than can be accepted—surely there should be no lack of willing volunteers in the service of our peerless Prince of Peace!

(1) *The fact that we have life should lead us to serve the Lifegiver. Gratitude* should ever powerfully prompt those who have been redeemed and saved by Jesus Christ. All we have, all we are, and all we ever hope to be, we owe to Him. He lived for us, laboured for us, bled for us, died for us, rose for us, and lives for us. The natural impulse of the redeemed heart is to say, "What can I do for Him? He redeemed me, I must serve Him." *Sympathy* with and for Jesus should lead us to attempt great things in His name. If our heart beats in sympathy with Him in the work which lies so near His heart and is so dear to Him, then, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" He may well ask the question. What answer can we honestly give? *Affection* for Him should make us long to serve Him. If we love Him we must serve Him, we must find out some way by which we can honour Him. "The love of Christ constraineth us," forces, impels, carries us on, until "necessity is laid upon us," and we can do none other than serve Him, placing every power, faculty, gift, and grace that He

has given us at His disposal. We are not our own, we are bought; and our Royal, Loving Owner, "Whose we are and Whom we serve," deserves to have every power we possess!

(2) *For each servant there is special Divine equipment.* The Master, who has given "to every man his work," has also graciously provided that the work shall be effectively done. To every worker He has said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you,"—Acts i. 8. If we have already had "power" given us to become sons, our immediate, pressing need is to seek the "power" o the Holy Ghost for service. In Him energized and quickened, we can "do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us." No matter who the worker may be, how humble or conspicuous his service, he needs this mighty power, and it is at his disposal. Christ will come in the power of the Holy Spirit upon every worker who, conscious of his own insufficiency, seeks the sufficiency of God; and as Dr. Gordon says, "When God comes as the secret invisible Spirit, like the wind which we cannot see, and cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; and when this Spirit shall dwell in His fulness in believers, moving their wills, inspiring their words and energizing their actions, then shall be seen the greatest things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls that have yet been witnessed."

(3) *The whole of our Christian life should be an unceasing service for Christ.* He whom we call Master

and Lord should be before us in all we do. The most effective way in which to glorify Him, and we can glorify Him in every condition of life, is by the consecration of every lawful relationship to Him, the consecration of all our life and labour, the consecration of every talent, the consecration of all our time, the consecration of all our substance to Him. As He has redeemed us, and set us apart for Himself, consecrated us to His service and for His glory, so ought we to consecrate everything we have and are to Him. Giving ourselves over "in full and glad surrender," let us willingly, gladly say, "Take my life, and let it be: Consecrated, Lord, to thee."

(4) *There is some specific service for each one to do.* God's way of reaching the unconverted is through His people. Not by those whom we call ministers alone, but by every sinner saved by grace; for though God has given to His Church "some Apostles, and some Evangelists, and some pastors and teachers," He does not intend that these should do the work while all the rest sit still. As some one has put it, "the first man called in the Gospel was an individual man saved, and the individual man is to save others." Christ's parting commission, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations," was not given to the eleven only, but to all the five hundred, and through them to all whom they represented, women as well as men. Christian, your name is in this commission, and it was Christ's last command. How precious are the last words of those whom we have loved on earth, how sacred any trust which such words have con-

veyed to us! How precious and sacred then to every one of Christ's followers should this last charge be, how intensely every heart should yearn to fulfil it! Verily we have been redeemed for service, saved that we may glorify God, commissioned that we may be fruitful, and called to be soul-winners. "This people have I found for myself, they shall show forth my praise,"—Isa. xliii. 21. Oh, to have a holy hunger for souls, a heart-yearning for the salvation of men! Anna Shipton tells us, in one of her beautiful volumes, of an hour when, weary in her work and longing for rest and Christ, she fell asleep and dreamed that through a sea of glass she was drawn by a strong cable to a city of gold, while heavenly watchers waved their welcome from the battlements, and echoes of heavenly melody made her long to be there. But looking back for a moment, at the sound of a bitter cry, she saw multitudes of men and women drowning around her, and throwing up their arms in wild and despairing cries for help. The sight so moved her that she turned her face upward again, and cried, "Father, not yet; a little longer let the glory wait, and send me back again to rescue and save these perishing ones!" Instantly the prayer was answered. She did not cease still to be borne heavenward, though now it was no longer alone: but scores were following behind her, and they were all drawn by her heart-strings. The cords of her very heart seemed to have loosed, and have become cables of love, which these sinking ones grasped as they followed on. While at every new burden her bosom

quivered with pain, and the water was red with her own warm blood.

"Days for deeds are few, my brother,
Then to-day fulfil thy vow:
If you mean to help another,
Do not dream it—do it now."

VIII.

EVANGELISTIC WORK

"And He gave some . . . . Evangelists."—EPH. iv. 11.

WHILE it is unquestionably true that the duty of each local Church is to seek the highest possible attainment of Christian life and character in those comprising its membership, and that the chief energies of a Church should be directed to the upbuilding of its own membership in Christ Jesus: yet it must ever be borne in mind that the strengthening of the members is that their powers, as an evangelizing agency, may thereby be increased, that, in fact, the Church may, in the fullest sense of the word, be a centre for the manifestation of the life of Christ to the world. What, after all, has been accomplished, if the members, coming regularly to diets of worship, and feeding upon the Bread of Life, do not manifest the result to the world in holier lives, more evangelistic fervour, and a deeper sympathy? In His great

intercessory prayer, our Divine Master and Lord says of His Church: "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world"; and that there may be no mistake as to the portion of the world and their special mission in it, He says elsewhere: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Placing these two verses side by side, we think ourselves warranted in affirming that the Church has failed in its mission, unless in any given time or place "every creature" has heard the sweet Evangel of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

As Christ was, so His Church is to be in the world. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and when the Church clearly recognizes her mission, she will understand that she is here not for herself and her own ends and purposes, but for the salvation of lost men. "A Church that does not exist to reclaim heathenism, to fight evil, to destroy error, to put down falsehood; a Church that does not exist to take the side of the poor, to denounce injustice, and to hold up righteousness,—is a Church that has no right to be. Christ's glory was that He laid aside His glory: and the glory of the Church is when she lays aside her respectability and her dignity, and counts it to be her glory to gather together the outcasts, and her highest honour to seek amid the foulest mire the priceless jewels for which Jesus shed His blood." To rescue sinners from destruction and lead to God, to hope, to holiness, to heaven, must ever be the heavenly occupation of the Churches of Jesus Christ!

For the manifold ministry of the Church, our Divine Master graciously designed a diversity of gifts, and has given some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. The first two of these offices have virtually passed away, not being any longer required, or their work being now performed by those designated "evangelist," or "pastor and teacher," and whose gifts were intended to meet a permanent need. In quoting this verse, the point I wish specially to emphasise is that the evangelist stands before the pastor and teacher, and there is good reason why it should be so. The pastor's work is to shepherd the flock, feeding the sheep and the lambs, or, as Paul puts it in his Epistle to Timothy, "Taking care of the Church of God." It is evident that the evangelist's work must precede this; the flock must be gathered for the shepherd; the Word of God must be preached and believed and acted upon, before the pastor and teacher can begin his work. The pastor will find plenty of labour with Christian households, among the believers: training and guiding those who are the fruit of evangelistic labour, instructing and feeding them in the things concerning the Kingdom.

In the verses which a certain popular Dean calls "the great baptismal Commission given by our Lord to His disciples" we have the two offices brought out very clearly: when He bids them to "teach all nations," with a view to making disciples or Christians; and then referring to baptism, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have com-

manded." The object of the one being to arouse the conscience, or the evangelist's work; the object of the other, to direct the heart and life of the Christian, or the Pastor's work. Do not, however, think I wish to infer from this that a pastor is not used to arouse or awaken the careless: quite the contrary. I firmly believe that every pastor may be an evangelist, though it does not necessarily follow that an evangelist may be a pastor. The faithful minister of Jesus Christ has, by God's design and constitution, two arms wherewith to do his work. He is to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering. He is on the one hand to arouse the conscience, preaching glad tidings to the multitude of sinful and unbelieving, or warning them of judgment, damnation and hell; proclaiming in the hearing of all he can reach the words of eternal life. While on the other hand he is to guide the Church, keeping before the members continually the varied motives to godly living which may be drawn from Gospel facts and incidents and the commands of Jesus Christ.

But while I believe that a pastor may be able to "do the work of an evangelist," and heartily rejoice that so many are earnestly and lovingly doing it, I also as firmly believe that there are many excellent pastors and teachers who do not possess the gift of an evangelist, and that therefore the necessity for the evangelist as a distinct office in the Church of Christ is to-day as great as ever. I know full well that the privilege is conferred upon every sincere believer of the Lord Jesus. "Let him that heareth say, come,"

being a command broad enough and plain enough to give every Christian authority to tell the story of salvation whenever and wherever the opportunity arises; following the example of the early Christians, who, being scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts viii. 4; ix. 19). At the same time the special office of evangelist still exists, and it is the privilege and duty of the Churches to recognize and honourably maintain a staff of men set apart solemnly and wholly for this work. I believe the Church has sadly erred in making pastors of many whom God had intended as evangelists, and evangelists only—giving them gifts suited for this work, and not for the pastorate. Philip's work is done when the Gospel is preached and souls are born unto God, and great joy is in the city. The Holy Ghost leaves it on record that he is "Philip the evangelist."

I am strongly in favour of carrying out the example of the early Christian Churches, the example of the Master Himself, and sending out at least two men, sending and keeping them together—two men with the love of God in their hearts, men who are not novices in the work of evangelizing; not laying hands suddenly upon them, but judging carefully of their suitability for the work, and commending them to the grace of the Lord Jesus; sending them forth with the sanction and authority of the Churches, for the one distinct purpose of preaching the Gospel. Every pastor knows, and every Church knows, that there are in all our Churches many who attend Sabbath after Sabbath, hearing the Word, but remaining unmoved.

Past experience assures me that among this class the evangelist reaps a rich reward. The seed already sown has from various causes apparently taken no root; but the Church meets to supplicate specially for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, real earnest prayer to God is made, the great need for immediate decision on the part of the unsaved presses heavily upon the members, the evangelist is invited, and God honours the faith of His believing ones by bringing many of those who had hitherto remained careless and indifferent into the fold. Nor need the pastor be at all jealous of this. True, the evangelist reaps, but he reaps where the pastor has faithfully sown; and who will say that he who has sown the seed will not have the greater reward at "that day"? Results that are tabulated by men as the outcome or fruit o the evangelist's work are, I often think, recorded by the Master of Assemblies, as the fruit resulting from the faithful sowing of the pastor.

The pressing need for evangelistic work is so great and so recognised by Christians everywhere, that numbers of men have risen up, gifted with glib tongues, and easy speech, and who style themselves evangelists, but who are in no way connected with or recognized by our churches; men whose doctrines are often as faulty as their methods are questionable; who make periodic descents upon our Churches, working, if not positive mischief, certainly not unmixed good. As the need for the evangelist clearly exists, the need ought to be met by the calling to such position by the churches of men whose gifts

mark them out as qualified for the work, who should have close and definite connection with and authority from the churches to carry out their work.

I am strongly of opinion that the time has come when we should give no sanction to evangelistic efforts held by men who have not the sanction and authority of our Assemblies, Conferences, or Unions, and therefore of all the churches. Evangelists who have been duly recognised and definitely set apart for this special department of work will not be likely, as many of these "wandering stars" are, to make the people sit loose to, or be dissatisfied with, their own minister or church. Nay, I am persuaded that visits from such men will lead to a deeper spirituality among Christians, a greater appetite for the means of grace, and a closer attachment to the Church, added to a possibly large increase to the rank and file of Church membership.

This is an age when novelty is largely utilised, an age when a great movement has risen up. A movement that has for its battle-cry "Every means or any means to save men," and beyond all doubt the novelty of its operations has attracted many who were not drawn by the more staid and solemn movement of the Church. I am not going to defend this great organization. I question very much if I could do so. I only fear that the possible good is largely outrun by the absolute harm resulting from the extravagances, absurdities, and levity which the followers too frequently practice in order to attract. The one thing I admire in their work is their unbounded enthusiasm.

I heartily wish that as Churches we could, in this respect, take a leaf out of their book, emulate them, and arouse ourselves to greater action and to more combined effort.

Enthusiasm is always necessary, and wherever seen is always beautiful. Would that our Churches had more of it! Unfortunately the thought in the mind of many is, that there cannot be enthusiasm without excitement or sensationalism. Never was there greater mistake. Who has shown greater enthusiasm in the work of reaching the masses, in preaching the Gospel, than did Mr. D. L. Moody, and he said, "I am never excited even in my most exciting meetings; I can sleep like a top within three minutes of going into a meeting, and I can be sound asleep three minutes after leaving it. If I were to get into such a state of nervous excitement as General Booth, for instance, gets into when he addresses large meetings, I should have been dead long ago. . . . There is nothing in my work approaching to the exhaustion, nervous and physical, which the operations of the Booth family involve."

We need not be afraid of showing too much earnestness or enthusiasm in our work. Some one has said, "If you would do good, you must be in earnest. An earnest man will always win the day." When we remember that—

> "Time is earnest, passing by;
> Death is earnest, drawing nigh,"

we need to be in earnest too. There are definite rules laid down in the New Testament, given by pre-

cept and example, for the carrying out of any evangelistic effort: let us abide by these. We believe that "the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation," let us in the intensity of our belief arrange that all men shall hear it. Our Gospel is worth bringing to men: bring it in the power of the Holy Ghost, and great results will follow. Talmage has well said that "the religion of Ralph Waldo Emerson is the philosophy of icicles: the religion of Theodore Parker a sirocco of the desert, of covering up the soul with dry sand; the religion of Thomas Carlyle only a condensed London fog; the religion of Renan the romance of believing nothing; the religion of the Spencers and Huxleys is merely a pedestal on which human philosophy sits shivering in the night of the soul, looking up at the stars, offering no hope to the nations that crouch and groan at the base."

If Mithridates liked hunting so well that for seven years he never went indoors, what enthusiasm ought we to have who are hunting for souls! If Domitian practised archery until he could have a boy stand in the Roman Amphitheatre with his hand out, and then shoot an arrow between his fingers without wounding him; if William Tell so practised the same art that he could shoot an apple from his son's head: how earnestly and heartily ought we, who are spiritual archers, practise the art, so that "arrows from the King's bow may sharply pierce the King's enemies." I have read that in the armoury of the Earl of Pembroke there are old corslets which show that the arrow of the English used to go through the breastplate,

through the body of the warrior, and out through the back-plate, proving that the English soldiers at that time were certainly not novices in their art. I believe we have the secret of earnest successful work for God, in the lines of Goethe—

"Persuasion, friend, comes not by toil or art;
Hard study never made the matter clearer.
'Tis the live fountain in the speaker's heart
Sends forth the streams that melt the ravish'd hearer.
Then work away for life, heap book on book,
Line upon line, and precept upon example:
The stupid folk may gape and look,
And fools may think your stock of wisdom ample;
But all remains unmoved. To touch the heart,
To make men feel, requires a different art.
For touching hearts, the only secret known,
My worthy friend, is this—to have one of your own."

In conclusion, I would say, that I believe the Churches have erred in the past by confining themselves to the pulpit. If the multitude, the masses, will not come to the Church: let the Church go to them—go to them with love in our hearts, and the message of life on our lips; and show to the world that the Church, composed of earnest, believing, godly men and women, is the great lever, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and through the Gospel, to lift men from degradation and sin, and make them pure, holy and useful.

Leigh Hunt has beautifully and strikingly said:—

"Abou Ben Adhem, may his tribe increase,
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold.

Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold.
'What writest thou?' The vision raised its head,
And with a look, made all of sweet accord,
Answered, 'The names of those who love the Lord.'
'And is mine one?' said Abou, 'Nay, not so,'
Replied the angel, Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still, and said, 'I pray thee then,
Write me as one who loves his fellow-men.'
The Angel wrote and vanished. The next night
He came again with a great awakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest."

IX.

MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

"And when they were come, and had gathered the Church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."

—Acts xiv. 27.

HERE is the story of a great missionary meeting, and the reports which were given by the returned missionaries. From the Church at Antioch Barnabas and Paul had received, under distinct instruction from the Holy Spirit, their commission to evangelise the Gentiles, and now they have returned to the same Church to give a formal account of their work. As when the Lord Jesus sent forth the seventy, two and two, into the outlying villages, commissioning them to preach, and enduing them with power, they shortly "returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name,"—so now these two return to tell the story that their mission had

been fruitful in the highest and holiest sense, that God had been glorified and men had been saved. It is good that our missionaries should return occasionally and stir up the churches. Missionary meetings, conducted by those who have been actually labouring for God in heathen lands, and whose hearts are in full sympathy with the Lord Jesus in His world-wide crusade, must always be valuable, helpful, and necessary. Every Christian should be interested in the extension of Christ's Kingdom the world over. The Church that is not interested, deeply interested in foreign missions, has failed to catch the Spirit of its Master. Bishop Dudley has gone so far as to say, "The man who does not believe in foreign missions does not believe in Jesus Christ." Certain it is that the man who professes to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and does not make his belief the business of his life, or is not personally interested in the spread of the truth concerning Christ, only believes in Him as he believes in some historic character, or in some dead fact of history which belongs to another age and has no living connection with him or influence upon his life.

In the great missionary meeting of our text the Apostle and his companion, in their report, give all the glory of their work to God. "They rehearsed all that God had done with them." It was ever so with these two holy men of God, in all their records of results they loved to give the undisputed and undivided glory to God. Thus in Acts xv. 4 and 12, we find that when received of the Church, and of the

Apostles and Elders, "they declared all the things that God had done with them . . . declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." Again in Acts xxi. 19, "Paul declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." They were but instruments; God, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit was the real worker. They took not a shred of honour to themselves. As Paul puts it in another place, "I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me." The work was pre-eminently God's, none but He could do such a work. But though God alone could do it, it must not be overlooked that He would not do it alone. "All He had done *with them*." It is ever God's way to work His spiritual wonders through Spirit-filled men. Blessed beyond telling are they who, placed wholly at God's disposal, let the Divine Worker work with them and through them as He wills!

As Paul rehearsed the story of God's doings and dealings, every Christian heart in the assembly would be *encouraged*. There is nothing more stimulating, more calculated to strengthen faith and arouse enthusiasm, than to hear of God's wonder-working power. What a story he had to tell, "How he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles," making faith, simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the crucified, risen Saviour, the door of entrance into His Kingdom. Showing, too, that Gospel privileges are offered to all who believe. With all our heart we praise Him that the same is true to-day. A door of faith has

been opened, through which all may freely enter and be saved. Again, in the rehearsal of the story, the *great need* would be pressed home. The very best men in the Church had been selected and sent forth to this foreign work, and doubtless many had demurred, but these facts would show them that God was right and had made no mistake in His choice of men; that, in fact, there was a pressing needs-be. Further, the *claims* of the heathen world would be better understood. Facts are stubborn things, and are bound to awaken sympathy with, and lead to a deeper study of, and warmer interest in, the Divine enterprise of missions.

These are the three words which are upon my heart just now—*Encouragement*, *Needs*, *Claims*. May the Holy Spirit lead my thoughts, and engage your attention!

I. The Encouragement Derived from Missionary Enterprise.

(1) *The hand of God is seen.* That a few men, without rank, wealth, learning, armies, or any of the earthly powers which the world rests upon, should conquer the Roman empire, revolutionize the world, destroy not the evil alone, but build up the greatest nations, the highest civilization, the purest morals, the noblest culture the world has ever seen, is the marvel of marvels, and is a proof of the Lord's doings. It has been said that the story of modern missions is the story of God in history. We have only to read it, to see God's hand in each detail. Originating with God, from the first He Himself in the power of the

Holy Spirit, has been with it. To see His hand is always an aid to faith, an encouragement to further and fuller service. William Carey, touched by the finger of God, and impelled by His Spirit, started out in expectation of great things from God; nor has God disappointed the faith of His servant, or those who have followed him, but has ever encouraged them in the strength of this expectation to attempt great things for Him, and in His grace reap rich results. Our missionary journals and magazines are full to the brim of manifest evidences of God's presence and power and blessing in connection with this work.

(2) *The power of prayer is evidenced.* The marvellous progress of the missionary enterprise from its commencement has been in answer to the prayers of the many who have pleaded with God on its behalf. The work was begun, has been continued, and must be carried on, by prayer. When in 1784 the Northhamptonshire Association urged upon all the Churches connected with it the necessity of holding meetings "to bewail the low state of religion, and to earnestly implore a revival of their Churches and the General Cause of the Redeemer," the first pull was given to the rope which has caused the ringing of the sweet Gospel bells the wide-world over. Dr. A. T. Pierson, who has made a profound study of missions, says: "In this Divine Crusade we are fighting no losing battle. . . . Missions were begun and are sustained in prayer. . . . In all crises in this enterprise prayer has been a victorious force." The

full triumph of Christ's conquering Gospel has not yet been attained. Vast multitudes have not yet heard the good news. But already the triumph is not small. The chief nations of the world profess Christianity, and the Gospel is being carried all the world over. If you would have a share in the enlarging triumphs of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, get into line with Him in this great crusade: join in with His praying ones; prove in your own experience the mighty power God has placed in His children's hands in prayer. Be sure you read the story of Christ's conquests in the present tense, more than in the past tense. Get awake and alive to the truth that to-day the Holy Spirit is still working miracles of grace!

(3) *The suitability of the Gospel to all nations and peoples has been proved.* "Go ye into all the world" was Christ's parting commission, and to-day we know, by the cogent testimony of results, that the Gospel to every creature is suited for every creature. Are we not ourselves the children of foreign missions? What it has done for us we believe it has done, is doing, and can do for others. Dr. Culross once said, "There are tribes, we are told, so low in the scale that they cannot count ten; but no tribe has been discovered that the Holy Love that went to the Cross cannot touch and renew." On an Alaskan steamer the passengers were proving that an Indian could not be civilized. A graduate of Marietta and Lane, a native Alaskan with bronze skin, who was on board, was called up, and as he told the story of what the Gospel

had done for him and his people, scepticism was silenced. "After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes, and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,"—Rev. vii. 9. Christ speaks a language which all can understand. His is the universal language, the language of Love. It suits all, and is bound to win.

II. The Need for Missionary Work.

Every objection that can possibly be raised against foreign missions has already been answered by the Holy Spirit Himself. "The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away,"—Acts xiii. 2, 3. There were many unconverted ones at Antioch, as there are in Christian lands to-day. Barnabas and Saul were probably the two most powerful and best equipped workers in the Church. But the Holy Ghost selected and sent forth the very best for this foreign work. The people at home can hear the Gospel if they will; and most of them have heard the call over and over again, and rejected it. If ever a fallacy was shattered to pieces and ground to powder by solemn fact, it is this argument about caring for the heathen at home before dealing with the heathen abroad. "This ought ye to have done, but not to leave the other undone."

(1) *The whole world needs the Gospel.* Christ died for India, China, Africa, as well as for these more favoured lands. With a population of fifteen hundred millions, it is safe to say that even hundred and fifty millions have never heard of Christ, or seen a copy of the Scriptures or the face of a living missionary. Thank God, much has been done, but much, oh so much, remains yet to be done! The population of the globe is far outstripping all the efforts of the Christian Church to overtake it. Dr. Arnold says, "the true and grand idea of the Church is a society for making men like Christ; earth like heaven; and the kingdoms of the world the kingdom of Christ." Almost nineteen hundred years have gone since Christ gave His parting command. Surely if all who know Him were doing their duty, it would not be true to-day that two-thirds of the race, at least, have not yet heard the Gospel?

(2) *More labourers are needed.* The fields are already white unto harvest. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest;" nor be surprised if in answer to your prayer He should thrust you forth, saying, "Go your ways: behold I send you." The work of carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth is as much our work as it was the work of the apostles. Christ needs the service of men and women of every calibre, and degree of gift; all can do something for Him in the uplifting of humanity. "Go ye" still sounds from the Master's lips in the ears of every loyal follower. Robert Morrison, of China, said, "Knowing that Jesus

wills that His Gospel shall be preached in all the world, and that the redeemed of the Lord are to be gathered out of every kindred and tongue and people; recollecting, moreover, the command of Jesus to go into all the world to preach the Gospel to every creature, I conceive it my duty, as a candidate for the holy ministry, to stand candidate for a station where labourers are most needed;" and James Gilmour, of Mongolia, said, "I go out as a missionary—not that I may follow the dictates of common sense, but that I may obey that command of Christ, 'Go ye into all the world and preach.' He who said 'Preach said also, 'Go ye into and preach,' and what Christ hath joined together let no man put asunder."

(3) *More prayer is needed.* From every field comes the request, "Brethren, pray for us." There are open doors. There is a weary, sorrow-stricken, sin-blighted, dying world needing the Gospel. A thousand obstacles seem to block the way. What is to be done? Heed the advice of the dying Japanese convert who said, "Advance on your knees." What if the world-powers are all arrayed against the Crucified One! What if wickedness, indifference, hatred, besides strong physical difficulties, rise like mountains and roll like towering seas to bar the progress of the Gospel! The Church of Christ has a power in prayer mightier than all world-forces combined. We may reach every mission field round by the way of the throne, and so powerfully influence the spiritual state of the missionaries, so effectually strengthen their hands that more and better work shall be accom-

plished than has ever yet been dreamed of. Let every Church member at home be themselves so filled with the Spirit as to gain power in prayer, and the results will be marvellous. Learn from the life-story of Hudson Taylor this one, simple lesson—"more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

(4) *More consecrated giving is needed.* You say you cannot go: then, send! In other words, give! All can give as the Lord has prospered. We have never had consecrated giving yet in the Church of Christ, except on the part of a few individuals. As it is, about one-half of all the people in our churches give nothing, and nine-tenths of all the offerings come from one-tenth of the members. Brother, the goods that God has given you are a sacred trust, not to be greedily hoarded, lavishly squandered, or selfishly enjoyed, but to be lovingly used, and generously employed in the service of God—for the glory of Christ, the extension of His Kingdom, and the upbuilding of His Church. "In the building up of God's Church, in which He is to make His abode, it becomes every child of His to contribute something, either wealth, or service, or skill."

> "Give strength, give thought, give deeds, give pelf,
> Give love, give tears, and give thyself;
> Give, give, be always giving,
> Who gives not is not living—
> The more we give the more we live."

III. The Claims of the Mission Field.

This work is God's. This enterprise is Divine. This crusade is for the King of kings.

(1) *It claims our profoundest thoughts.* Speaking of the great Temperance crusade, Miss F. R. Havergal once said, "I have not taken up temperance, it has taken me up." Let us study the great enterprise of missions until we are taken up by it. It claims our thoughts, not occasionally, not by fits and starts, but always. Is it not a fact that ninety-nine out of every hundred Christians have not the remotest shadow of an idea of the horrors of heathendom? One who occupied the position of a lady of means and intelligence asked a gentleman where "Zenana" was. She had heard of work in the Zenanas, and showed how profound her ignorance was by asking this question. Let us read, and pray, and ponder, and study, until the claims of the mission-field are burned into our very souls.

(2) *It claims our deepest sympathy.* Is it too harsh to say that the man who is not in sympathy with missions is not in sympathy with God? Sometimes it is to speak even a harsh truth in order to quicken and arouse. God has entrusted us with the Gospel; it is "heaven's coin for circulation throughout the world," what are we doing with it? If we declare it not, circulate it not, shall not the blood of the heathen be required at our hand? We must be in fullest sympathy with our blessed Lord in this great work. We must take some part, however small, in sending the glad news "all the world around." The secret of a deepening sympathy is in our tarrying in the presence of God day by day until we are filled with His Spirit, and the life of God is deepened and

strengthed in our souls, and we realize "the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe." To one believing in this power nothing seems impossible.

> "Oh matchless honour, all unsought,
> High privilege surpassing thought,
> That Thou shouldst call me, Lord, to be
> Linked in work fellowship with Thee;
> To carry out Thy wondrous plan,
> To bear Thy messages to man;
> In trust with Christ's own word of grace,
> To every soul of human race."

(3) *It claims our entire consecration.* Some years ago in a sermon preached by the Rev. W. V. Robinson, B.A., and published in our own "Missionary Herald," I found these words—they are well worth quoting, and worth our pondering. "Do we want the old truths of the Gospel to be fresher, and fuller, and stronger for us as the years go by? Do we want to grow in Christ-like compassion, and in Christ-like brotherliness and Christ-like sacrifice? Do we want our Churches to be patient in aggressive Christian work, to work in loyal obedience to Christ's command, in honoured companionship with Him, in simple reliance upon His might? Then let us lend a willing hand and give a loving heart to the most noble, the most successful, the most blessed work that the world has ever seen."

Those who have studied the habits of bees tell us that peculiar food in abundance, with larger space to grow in, transforms a common worker honey-bee into a queen bee. The larger sphere, the grander hopes

and ideas, the fuller gifts of the Holy Spirit, the greater self-denial, the inspiration to prayer and thought which Missions bring to the soul transform the ordinary Christian into a valiant soldier for Jesus Christ. We need to have burned into our quickened conscience, by the Holy Spirit, that the world needs nothing more than men and women wholly consecrated to Christ, who shall go forth to labour and if needs be suffer in the Spirit of the Saviour, "whose we are and whom we serve," the perfect Worker, the Great Captain and Victorious Leader of an ever-conquering army. When the Old Guard swept down the slope at Waterloo to charge the English squares, they saw at their head the proud plume of Marshal Ney. They knew that they had followed that plume to many a victory, from frozen Moscow to sunny Italy. And they followed it now with pride and supreme confidence; but the result proved that even the Old Guard with Ney at its head could be defeated, for it was shattered and hurled back in utter rout. Brethren, we follow One who never has and never can be defeated. Fall into line. Follow on fearlessly and courageously, and you also shall yet triumph in His victory.

X.

"THIS GRACE ALSO"

"Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also."

—2 Cor. viii. 7.

IN this chapter the Apostle brings all his powers of argument to bear on the task of urging upon the Corinthian Christians the duty and privilege of giving. The subject is one which came up very early in the Christian Church ; nor has the necessity for bringing it before the minds and hearts of Christians been removed. How many of us can honestly say that to the praise of the glory of His name, we are exercising to the fullest of our ability "this grace also"?

The subject of Liberality never has been a popular one. It was no more popular in Paul's days than it is now. Paul was an adept in the art of introducing an unpopular subject in the most kindly and judicious way. With much holy ingenuity he here brings out

all the excellent qualities of the Corinthian Christians: so that, by praising them for what he has found good in them, he might stimulate them to a more generous manifestation of "this grace also." It is always well to bring out a man's good points. There is no surer way of exciting his powers, encouraging him to make fresh efforts, inspiring him to correct or make up all that is missing. Just as a wise and skilful physician by building up the general system, and establishing the healthful discharge of the functions, does more to eradicate disease than he could by any direct attack upon the disease itself.

Paul is anxious that the Christian life and character of the Corinthian converts should be complete in every part, "lacking nothing." He desires that their life should be made all of a piece. How full the picture he here portrays; how noble the character he draws; how varied the gifts delineated. "Ye abound in everything," he says, and then enumerates some of the excellencies in which they abound. FAITH. UTTERANCE. KNOWLEDGE. ALL DILIGENCE. LOVE. What more could be asked from any body of Christians than this? Can anything be wanting to crown and complete this list? Yes! "See," he adds, pointing to LIBERALITY, "that ye abound in this grace also." Let us note:—

I. THE GRACES IN WHICH THE CORINTHIANS ABOUNDED.

(1) *Faith.* This heads the list and must ever do so. The foundation of all that is good and noble in

character will ever be faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour, and the going out of the heart to Him in confidence and trust. This is the real basis of everything that is noble and lofty. This is the only footing on which a man may work with any certainty of success. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him,"—Heb. xi. 6; but, on the other hand, "all things are possible to him that believeth,"—Mark ix. 23.

While faith stands first, and rightly so, it must ever be borne in mind that the faith which is the foundation of all excellencies is only the foundation. The true conception of Christian faith is that it is the root from which may come, and ought to come, "whatsoever things are true, and pure, and lovely, and of good report." Faith is the "potentiality of wealth," but it is not the wealth. Faith is the root of all goodness, the foundation of the house, but must not be mistaken either for the goodness or the house.

(2) *Utterance.* To their faith was added the gift of utterance, or eloquence. They were able to sound out by lip, as well as by life, the story of what God, for Christ's sake, had done for them. It is no small advantage to a Church when its members are able to give an intelligent "reason for the hope that is in them." Many have faith, but lack utterance; while, alas! many have utterance, and lack faith. Believing lips are always eloquent lips. The man who can speak with the accent of conviction is always eloquent, though his speech be stammering. It tends greatly to the edification of believers, and the

advancement of the name and glory of God, when Church members can, in the joyousness of spiritual experience, say, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul,"—Psa. lxvi. 16.

(3) *Knowledge.* They not only believed what they uttered, but uttered that which they knew. With many, unfortunately, their utterance is simply "the effect and evidence of their ignorance." Not so with these Corinthian Christians: they abounded in knowledge. They spake that which they knew, and testified that which they had seen. The Christian who can stand up and boldly say, "I know," bears a witness for his Lord which is undisputable. That which a man knows he can tell simply and convincingly. When Christians are blessed with the gift and grace of knowledge, there is little fear of their being "carried about by winds of doctrine."

(4) *All Diligence.* That is, they were diligent in all things. They believed that "the King's business required haste." Life was too short to be idled away, the moments too precious to let slip unused. The passing opportunities must be eagerly bought. They were thoroughly in earnest, and gave their whole mind to the matter of Christian growth and development. This is the cure for all diseases of the Christian life. If you want to be a strong Christian —be diligent! No man becomes a vigorous Christian by any other course than that of earnest, whole-hearted diligence. Half and half Christians are of no use either to God or man. You might as well

try to pierce the Alps with a straw as to grow like Christ, unless you are in earnest.

(5) *Love to us.* They abounded in Affection for their spiritual teachers. They loved their pastors. Happy the pastor who has a loving, affectionate people. Happy the people who have a pastor whom they can love. How much easier it is to work, and how much better work can be done, when the bond of love unites teacher and taught. Will not that ministry be strong and successful, where the pastor is upheld and encouraged by the loving sympathy of his people?

Truly the Apostle has drawn a noble picture, and has described a model Church. What more can we desire than trustful faith, burning eloquence, abundant knowledge, earnest diligence, and binding love? But note:—

II. THE ONE GRACE WANTED TO COMPLETE THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER,—"See that ye abound in this grace also."

There is always great danger that certain virtues will be neglected. We are liable to give prominence to some, while others, just as important, are starved by neglect. In exactly the same list as faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, love, Paul places the grace of liberality. Do not come short in this. Show how practical and genuine all the other virtues are by supplying this, and abounding in it too. Do not look upon it as anything less than a grace. Do not think of it in any other sense than worthy of being placed in the same category as the very best of

the graces. Show the sincerity of all the others by the evidence of your generosity. Remember, all graces can be procured and cultivated. We can procure the grace of liberality by praying for it, and cultivate it by bringing it into constant exercise. Like every other grace, it grows by being exercised.

There are many interesting points in connection with giving in this chapter; points which give us practical lessons, and helpful advice upon the subject. We can only glance at a few, but let us read them carefully, mark them particularly, and digest them thoroughly.

(1) *The spirit of liberality is a Divine gift.* "The grace of God hath been given in the Churches of Macedonia,"—Verse 1, R.V. The liberal giving of these Churches was the fruit of God's gracious influence bestowed upon them. As like produces like, so God's royal bounty produces generous and abundant giving. God's free favour leads to abounding liberality. Though the Christian gives of his own free will, yet at the back of his freedom he sees the grace of God, and to his own heart he says, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Then, looking up into the face of God, he exclaims, "All things come from Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee."

(2) *Poverty does not debar from the privilege of giving.* We have a very striking example and illustration of this in the case of the Macedonians, of whom we read, "The abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality,"—Verse 2.

They were placed in the most trying circumstances, persecuted, dismissed from service, under apprehension of complete destitution, suffering loss for Christ's sake; yet, "in spite of their troubled condition, they displayed great joyfulness, and in spite of their poverty, they displayed great liberality." The "joy" of a new-found salvation not only overpowered all sense of their poverty, "deep" as that was, but rose unto rich liberality. In the matter of giving, the first thing needful is not a well-filled purse, but a willing mind. God judges our gifts both by the state of the heart behind them, and the proportion they bear to what is left. It was the extreme poverty of the widow (Mark xi. 44) that made her gift of such great price. The largest gifts do not often come from the richest people. The widow's mite was proportionately more than the abundant gifts of all the others. A gift that has little value in itself may be priceless because of the spirit which prompts it. Dr. Culross tells of his child, who came out to him on one occasion as he was about to leave home for a journey, and, putting *a penny* into his hand, said, "Father, this is all for yourself." Was such a gift worth only its money value?

(3) *True giving will always spring from consecration.* "They first gave their own selves unto the Lord," —Verse 5. This is the true order. First ourselves, then our substance. Not yours, but you is what the Lord requires. God wants ourselves; all our capabilities, aims, hopes, ambitions, everything that makes up our lives; He claims all, and will give no real and

abiding peace while we keep anything back. When once we surrender ourselves, then all we have and are will be at God's disposal; we will recognise that all is His; that we are stewards, and that "it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." The gifts which spring from a consecrated life and surrendered heart will neither be few nor small; the donor of such gifts may not possess much of this world's goods, but his giving will always be "as God has prospered him." God's claims will be heartily recognised and lovingly responded to. Whatever may be our position financially, we have each received freely from the God of grace: let us give as freely. We may be quite sure that our Sovereign Lord will not allow any one of His people to be in His debt. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward His Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister,—"Heb. vi. 10. It has been well said, "If you surrender to Christ all *you* have, He will bestow upon you all *He* has."

(4) *Giving finds its model and inspiration in the example of Christ.* "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich,"—Verse 9. There is nothing so calculated to move to right action as a sight of Christ, and a knowledge of His grace. Have you seen Him? Do you know Him? Have you experienced His grace? Have you "through His poverty" been enriched beyond your highest dreams?

If we are His, we are called upon to be imitators of Him. How rich He was, we may guess from the fact, that for more than 1800 years He has been making myriads rich in all spiritual gifts and graces.

If Christ has done so much for us, at so great a cost, how can we refrain from giving to His cause? Do you call Him Master and Teacher, Saviour and Lord? How can you hope to be recognised as His followers, if you are not treading in His steps?

"Give God the whole!—no paltry thing retain
Out of His gifts to thee;
Give up the treasures!—'tis our sweet gain,
Losing the boons we see,
Christ's creditors to be.

Love Him the while!—and smiling bid Him take
All causes of thy pride;
Off'ring the sacrifice for His dear sake,
Jesus, whom all denied,
Who for each sinner died."

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